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THE PEOPLE WHO “BURN”: “COMMUNICATION,” UNITY, AND CHANGE IN BELARUSIAN DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC CREATIVITY

Anton Dinerstein

THE PEOPLE WHO "BURN": "COMMUNICATION," UNITY, AND CHANGE IN BELARUSIAN DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC CREATIVITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

ANTON DINERSTEIN

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DEDICATION

To the people who “burn.”

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ABSTRACT

THE PEOPLE WHO "BURN": "COMMUNICATION," UNITY, AND CHANGE IN BELARUSIAN DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC CREATIVITY

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The main intellectual problem I address in this study is how everyday communication activates the relationship between creativity, conflict, and change. More specifically, I look at how the communication of creativity becomes a process of transformation, innovation, and change and how people are propelled to create through everyday communication practices in the face of conflict and opposition. To approach this problem, I use the case of communication in modern-day Belarus to show how creativity becomes a vehicle for and a source of new social and cultural routines among the independent grassroots communities and initiatives in Minsk.

On one level, I show how local research participants communicate six cultural identities through a cultural discourse when they speak about public creativity in Belarus. Additionally, I show how these categories of identity are structured as oppositional cultural codes, such as "State" vs. "People" or "Indifferent people" vs. "Talented, really creative people," and how these discursive oppositions reflect a similar dynamic found in

Ruthenian/Russian culture where the continuous interplay of opposing values has been a foundation of cultural unity throughout history.

On another level, I show how the participants of these grassroots communities problematize the existing ideas and practices of being a Belarusian and of being a citizen in general. The prevailing cultural myth suggests that Belarus, like many post-Soviet spaces, is inferior to the "progressive" "West" and the "USA." However, this is not the way Belarus is symbolically constructed in the grassroots communities I studied. The Belarus they envision living within is a place of togetherness, of synergetic cooperation, and with the emergence of alternative mythology and everyday routines out of which cultural, business, and social innovations arise.

On yet another level, this research suggests that the process of creativity is, in its essence, a process of innovation, transformation, and change. I argue that such creative transformative processes in the society involve conflict, opposition, a struggle with everyday reality, out of which innovations come to life.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERALL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

"Let him that would move the world,
first move himself"
– Socrates.

"If you want to change the world,
start with yourself"
– Gandhi.

It was a Saturday morning in Minsk, Belarus – early September. I put my sunglasses on and headed downtown where other people in shorts and dresses were out populating the city streets. I was walking down the street when I heard Brazilian drums beating loudly. I saw a group of people in colorful clothes, dancing, whistling, and shouting into the air. Their eyes were shining, their smiles were too, their faces seemed relaxed and full of joy. I stopped and smiled myself. My legs and arms unintentionally started to move following the drum rhythm. I saw others doing the same – people were smiling and seemed struggling not to dance at the same time. I felt both joyful and puzzled – Brazilian drums are not an everyday thing in Belarus, where the public assembly is restricted and where smiles are scarce. The drummers were rehearsing for the Vulica Brazil (Brazil Street) – an independently organized urban festival, which would start later that day. For a moment, I found myself in a parallel reality, where everyone was joyfully dancing and smiling. This event felt different from the regular state-organized Soviet-like public activities. "It appears, that we live in two parallel Belaruses…" – one of my interlocutors told me earlier when discussing the difference in public events organized by the state authorities and grassroots independent producers. I could definitely feel this difference with my whole body that day…

Belarus is frequently portrayed by outsiders as "The last dictatorship in Europe." However, at the same time, there has been a proliferation of grassroots, public creative practices, and gatherings, like *Vulica Brazil*, especially in urban areas. Hence, there is a puzzle: if public life in Belarus is as restricted as media and various academic accounts report it, how is it possible that public creativity and expression can be so vibrant?

The main intellectual problem I address in this study is how everyday communication activates the relationship between creativity, conflict, and change. More

specifically, I look at how the communication of creativity becomes a process of transformation, innovation, and change and how people are propelled to create through everyday communication practices in the face of conflict and opposition. To approach this problem, I use the case of communication in modern-day Belarus to show how creativity becomes a vehicle for and a source of new social and cultural routines among the independent grassroots communities and initiatives in Minsk.

This study focuses on how the people of Belarus themselves create and communicate meanings about their identities, relationships, actions, feelings, and dwelling in the culture they share. By examining the meanings generated in these grass-roots public events, I hope to gain insight into the social change and cultural transformation, which are not evident in macro, top-down approaches to culture and society.

For such a study, I integrate cultural discourse (CuDA) and ethnography of communication (EOC) theoretical perspectives to provide a detailed account of the modern-day Belarusian culture as perceived and performed in communication by the participants of the grassroots independent initiatives which involve the phenomena of public creativity.

The study provides an in-depth cultural discourse analysis of current Belarusians as they both participate in and discuss public creative events and related forms of collective action. It addresses the following questions about culture and identity in Belarusian discourse to investigate how identity is created and negotiated in everyday communication:

How do Belarusians involved in creative and artistic public events understand these activities? How does this involvement relate to different types of Belarusian identities? How do these understandings relate to specific broader social and historical contexts in Belarus?

This perspective allows interpreting the statements made by the cultural participants involved in public creativity from a local standpoint. For example, what might it mean when Belarusians say that "in regard to culture, we live in two parallel Belaruses," or "the most awesome initiatives in Belarus are created by the people who burn," or "it is difficult to call The National Art Museum a state structure because it was magnificent," or "it appears, it is possible to cooperate with state structures," and so on?

Thus, I focus on cultural key terms and their local meanings about the kinds of people involved in public creativity and about the meaning of these kinds of public assembly from the standpoint of the cultural participants. Which is essential, since the concepts and practices that may seem familiar for an outsider, may have wholly unexpected or drastically distinctive meanings when encountered in other cultural contexts. Additionally, I approach the Belarusian *community* through its *communal conversation* where cultural key terms are explicated both through the current cultural discourses and considered in the local historical and cultural perspective.

I conceptualize public creative practices as communication events which have within them a Belarusian discourse. These events include various urban festivals and street performance, public lectures, and independent educational initiatives and workshops; poetry and literature recitals; business, social entrepreneurship, and art clubs.

The concept also includes communities grouped around such practices and distinct venues where such practices are held throughout the city of Minsk and Belarus in general.

Addressing the questions above allows describing the cultural forms of public creativity found in Belarus today from the standpoint of their participants who are involved in the process of creation, enactment, and maintenance of these cultural phenomena in the county. Addressing these questions about public creativity also allows explaining how and why such forms come into existence in Belarus and what role do they play for their participants.

The analysis focuses on the ways Belarusians talk about identity and personhood both when involved in and when they reflect upon the practices of public creativity, thus analyzing meta-cultural commentary in and about the cultural practice at hand.

1.1 Context and background

Some background on the Belarusian situation is required to explain why the current proliferation of public creativity in the country should be at all considered as a legitimate case for approaching the problems of identity, creativity, and cultural change from the communication standpoint.

One of the main reasons, as I mentioned at the beginning, is that the "dictatorship" trope with top-down approaches to analyzing Belarus prevail in the existing studies and media accounts. At the same time, many other cultural phenomena and forms of Belarusian social and public life have been vastly disregarded, especially in Western academia. Current studies on Belarusian identity have mostly focused on nation-building and national identity (e.g., Marples, 1999; Kuzio, 2001; Ioffe, 2007; Ioffe, 2008; Wilson, 2011, Fabrykant, 2019); politics, identity, and democratic process (e.g., Ioffe, 2008;

Wilson, 2011; Becus, 2014; Bedford, 2017; Bedford & Vinatier, 2017); and collective and historical memory (e.g., Ioffe, 2008; Goujon, 2010; Wilson, 2011). The most complete cultural account on Belarusian identity is provided by Cherniyavskaya (2006), where the archetype of "a traditional Belarusian" is shown via folklore data and in Cherniyavskaya (2010), where the historical cultural divides within the Belarusian society are explained. However, neither of these studies explore contemporary discourses about identity and cultural practices in a refined way.

It is worth mentioning that Belarus is a presidential republic, and thus the political power is concentrated in the hands of its president. President Lukashenka has ruled the country for over 25 years and remains in power since 1994. The country is considered an authoritarian state and is commonly featured in Western academic literature as the "last dictatorship in Europe" (e.g., Ioffe, 2008; Wilson, 2011). "Dictatorship is our brand," as the president's press-secretary has mentioned recently in a public address. Most of the English-language scholarship on Belarus tend to address in one way or another the issues of strict political and social control over the population and public assembly which the president uses to hold his power (e.g., Marples, 1999; Goujon, 1999; Ioffe, 2007; Becus, 2010). Though, Grigory Ioffe (2008; 2014) has attempted to show how Lukashenka's authoritarian leadership style finds support among the majority of the Belarusian population in contrast to his political opposition.

Additionally, Belarusian land has a long and complicated history being located at the juncture of distinct cultural values and political influence. Thus, it has been for a long time perceived as merely a land "in-between," the territory between Poland and Russia (Pershai, 2010). The Polish side referred to Belarus as to its "Eastern province," while the

Russian side used to treat it as its “Western edge” (Kuzio, 2001). Similarly, Belarusian land was a battleground for opposing cultural values – both subject to Catholic influence emanating from Poland and Orthodox influence coming from Russia (Pershai, 2010). It found itself on the civilizations divide between East and West (Ioffe, 2008).

As a result, Belarusian national identity has been a subject for debate, which has also been addressed by most of the literature (most complete recent accounts would be Ioffe, 2008 and Wilson, 2011). Similarly, one of my interlocutors mentioned that “in terms of culture, we live in two parallel Belaruses, where [the] state creates something for themselves.” While the issues of Belarusian national identity have been addressed in many studies, the cultural perspective on identity that may explicate such statements as presented above from the standpoint of local cultural participants has been generally overlooked.

Another reason for looking into the Belarusian case of public creativity is that public events and expression in Belarus are more clearly politically loaded than in Western Europe and the United States. Unsanctioned public assembly is currently prohibited in the country, which restricts political opposition and protest to the regime. The legislation on public assembly became stricter after the so-called “clapping protests” when thousands of people went on the streets opposing the harsh currency and economic crisis that happened in the country in 2011. The protesters used social media to schedule the protest times and convened together in the center of the city to walk together and clap silently. The people did this to sarcastically applaud the authorities and the president for their rule over the country. The protests lasted for almost three months (May 23 - August 17) accompanied by arrests, social media blockings by the authorities, and other forms of

restrictions in attempts to prevent the people from going on the streets. On July 29, 2011, the unsanctioned public assembly was officially banned by the state. Inspired by these events, the *Ig Nobel Peace Prize* committee awarded President Lukashenka with the mocking trophy in 2013.

Multiple arrests and the use of brutal police force against political demonstrations in Belarus have also been vastly reported in media and existing academic literature. Nevertheless, there has been growing popularity and proliferation of various forms of public creativity and related practices in recent years. Such public creative practices include urban festivals, public lectures, street performance, poetry and literature communities, social entrepreneurship projects, and other related activities. Most of these practices originate as grassroots initiatives across the country, especially in the urban areas and major cities, such as Minsk.

In this dissertation, I consider these events as a lens through which one may observe social and political change, along with the major underlying struggles that accompany the current cultural transformation in the country. Though mostly artistic and ostensibly non-political, these public creative practices and communities that group around them move beyond the merely aesthetic dimension. I attempt to explore in this study how these initiatives become platforms where alternative Belarusian identity is manifested contrary to the everyday social routines and current political order. I attempt to show how such creative practices become liminal spaces where participants may experience shared values and live thorough alternative and shared social experiences that are unavailable to them otherwise.

Having all the above in mind and going back to the overall questions listed at the beginning, I plan to show what do these public creative practices mean for those who participate in them. I also plan to show how do these participants enact, create, and maintain various collective identities and how all this interacts with broader social and historical contexts in Belarus. By performing this analysis, I hope to get closer to the understanding of the main intellectual problem posed by this research project: investigating the relationship between conflict, creativity, and change as elements of everyday communication.

1.2 Communication studies of Belarus

The previous section addressed the rationale for studying local cultural meanings and key terms found in everyday communication about public creativity. I have mentioned several studies from the academic fields of political science, nationalism studies, public policy, history, and collective memory to show the existing gap of knowledge about Belarusian cultural and public life.

This section provides a review of current communication literature on Belarus and indicates a similar tendency toward political topics. This literature is not solemnly focused on the "dictatorship" trope and touches upon other topics as well. I have grouped the recent communication studies of Belarus into eight topical categories to show what topics and communication approaches have been used by various scholars of Belarus.

The studies of the *first group* look at communication through its relation to culture and spaces. Thus, a study by Charapan (2018) looks at the way people interact with and frame the hybrid spaces of ethnographic open-air museums based on special affordances

and communicative design strategies used on-site to introduce the visitors to the museum objects.

In the study by Huzhalovskiy (2018), the author tries to show how the concept of museum and museum practices have been "transferred" from the European space to Belarus, beginning from the XVI century. The author shows how local museum practices developed on the borderlands of Russian and Polish cultural influence, which had distinct perceptions of Antiquity and Christian legacy, thus continuing the cultural opposition between Rome and Byzantium. As a result of this opposition, the cultural "transfer" of the museum practices from Europe into the Belarusian cultural context has been problematic. However, nevertheless, it created the base for the modern Belarusian museum tradition.

Another study by Pigalskaya (2016) compares Belarusian practices for poster design during Soviet times and after the collapse of the USSR and shows how the poster purpose and content changed through the 1990s. She argues that the introduction of new technologies and socio-political changes in the country during this period allowed the designers to turn to more commercial and artistic forms in poster design as opposed to agitating and ideological themes of the former USSR.

Yet one more recent study in this group (Karaliova, 2016a) attempts to show how Belarusian national identity and rhetoric of resistance are constructed and performed by one of the banned Belarusian musicians. The scholar shows how Lavon Volski metaphorically uses the themes of Belarusian social and political life to address these issues and current problems that exist in society.

The studies of the *second group* look at the issues of language and policy. Thus, Kožinova (2017) looks at language policy in Belarus during the period between the October Revolution and WWII and shows how the periods of Belarusization historically coincided with various socio-political needs. For example, the weakening Russian control over the territory by Germans during WWI or the need to recruit the Belarusian peasantry into the Bolshevik movement. The article also shows how the Russian language norms and practices have been seeping into the Belarusian territory supplanting Yiddish and Belarusian written communication, as well as the use of Polish in Belarus of those times.

The study by Smolicz & Radzik (2004) investigates the problem of the status of the Belarusian language and state policies that lead to its decline, as well as discusses the relationship between language and Belarusian national identity. A different study by Pavlenko (2006) provides a historical analysis of Russian language policy in the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The scholar investigates language status and usage practices as a lingua franca in the post-Soviet states where the stance toward Russian varies from active derussification policies in Baltic states to its active everyday use in Belarus.

Another study by Bobko (2017) looks at various metacommunicative turns and language choices that Belarusian- and Russian-language online forum users employ during online interactions. The author argues that the Belarusian language attains a different attitude as compared to Russian in these online discussions, which is a result of its cultural symbolism and ethnic consolidating means among the Belarusian-language forum users.

The *third group* of communication studies about Belarus focuses on education, linguistics, pragmatics, and communication design. Thus, one of these studies by Biktagirova & Khitryuk (2016) investigates the communicative and methodological challenges in implementing the model of inclusive preschool education based on the experimental studies conducted at two Belarusian and one Russian university. The authors suggest that pedagogical conditions and willingness of the teachers to work in an inclusive environment are essential in the formation of the inclusive readiness for working in inclusive education.

Another study by Samburskiy & Quah (2014) discusses the problem of corrective feedback provided by the novice online tutors of the English language in Belarus. It suggests that teachers need to develop a repertoire of strategies of addressing form in communicative context to help the students succeed. The study by Vasilyeva (2018) looks at how interactivity is constructed at the female discussion club in Belarus in a multi-person semi-informal educational context. It employs a communication design perspective and discourse analysis to show how participants' and facilitator's use of communicative resources plays a role in the construction of a meeting.

Another study in this group (Eromeitchik, 2009) focuses on the sphere of social advertising in Belarus and its linguistic resources and communicative features for appraisal and evaluation, which are used to impact the addressee. Among the most frequently used lexical stylistic means of appraisal in the Belarusian social advertising, the author points out a metaphor, epithet, simile, allusion, pun, idiom, and cliché. The most frequently used syntactical stylistic means of appraisal are inversion, rhetorical

question, parallelism, enumeration, chiasmus, antithesis, polysyndeton, ellipsis, and nominative sentence.

The fourth group of communication studies focuses on political communication and public opinion. Thus, the study by Karaliova (2016b) looks at presidential New Year's address and attempts to show how the leaders of Russia, Belarus, and Poland used their New Year speeches to communicate distinct ideas about geopolitics, unity and conformity, and national identity in each of the countries. Another study by Koulinka (2014) investigates how voters made their choices among the nearly identical promises of social justice and well-being made by the candidates during the first Belarusian election in 1994. The study also attempts to decode and compare political texts issued by the Belarusian Popular Front and by and on behalf of Alexander Lukashenko during the first years of the country's independence.

The study by Manaev, Manayeva, & Yuran (2011) looks at the causes of authoritarian rule and the long-lasting survival of the Belarusian authoritarianism in particular. The authors argue that the unfinished nation-building project and deep divisions with the Belarusian society, which result in ambiguity about local national identity, become one of the reasons the current ruling regime was able to survive for such a long time. Another study by the same scholars (Manaev, Manayeva, & Yuran, 2010) addresses the issue of the "spiral of silence" in the Belarusian state-run media during the 2001 and 2008 elections. The authors argue that the authorities in Belarus use the media as a tool of controlling the public opinion during the election periods, whereas the principles of collectivism and unity among the Belarusian publics create an additional

barrier in resisting the official agenda, thus reinforcing the "spiral of silence" effects among the masses.

The study by Matonyte & Chulitskaya (2012) looks at the 2010 Belarusian election campaign and investigates the issue of political communication in non-democratic countries based on the case of Belarus. The authors focus on third sector organizations and argue that such organizations in Belarus are marginalized by the local authorities and state officials who reduce the third sector discursive and policy options for action in the country. While the study by Ociepka (2012) addresses the issue of public diplomacy as employed via social media by the European Union newly accepted members, such as Baltic states and Eastern European countries. The specific focus in the article is on the Polish case of public diplomacy directed toward the citizens of Belarus – Belsat satellite TV channel and interactive platform, which is available online and provides news and policy-related content to Belarusians in the Belarusian language. The author argues that while traditional media forms, such as TV, are still primarily used for public diplomacy issues, social media also becomes a growing channel for this purpose internationally.

The fifth group of communication studies on Belarus focuses on the themes of media, technology, and change. Thus, a study by Lysenko & Desouza (2014) looks at the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and how they are related to the changes in political protests and cyber-protest related tactics in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. While another study by the same scholars (Lysenko & Desouza, 2015) looks specifically at how the Belarusian authorities used ICTs during the

period of color revolutions in 2001-2010 to block and prevent revolutionary activity in the country.

Another study by Navumau (2019) looks at social media as a platform for emergence and maintenance of counter-hegemonic discourses on the example of the silent protests, also known as the "clapping protests," in Belarus. The author argues that in contrast to previous planned political actions organized by the Belarusian opposition, the participants of clapping protests did not have a unified political agenda and had been gathering weekly during the Summer of 2011 to show solidarity with fellow citizens. The unique feature of these protests was that they were not centrally organized and that the participants used social media to schedule the meeting times and dates. This information was made known sometimes just minutes before the collective gathering, which made it more difficult for the authorities to prevent the gatherings and for the opposition leaders to use them for their political ends.

The *sixth group* of studies focuses on nuclear energy, health, and risk communication. One of such studies (Novikau, 2017a) talks about the terms "radiophobia" and "Chernobyl syndrome" as used in media by the Belarusian pro-nuclear camp to address the "irrationality" about the possible nuclear energy risks among the lay public. Another study by the same scholar (Novikau, 2017b) looks into the Belarusian public debate on nuclear power. It suggests that local political structure strongly affects the nuclear risk communication in the country where the information about nuclear power provided by the government research institutions was deliberately constructed to fit the current official political agenda, which was amplified by the mainstream media. At the same time, the author suggests that the public and NGOs have been excluded from the

nuclear power debate while their voices have been muted. The author also emphasizes that there is a lack of trust among the Belarusian population regarding nuclear issues and that the trust cannot be regained without a proper public dialogue.

Another study by Phedorenko et al. (2019) argues that there has been a reduction in informing Belarusian citizens about the consumption of iodized salt and iodine, which are important for their health, with the issue being paid less and less attention in mass media and social advertising. As a result, the authors have attempted to assess the population awareness about the issues of iodine deficiency and consumption. Based on the assessment, the authors conclude that the population consumes a proper amount of iodine. However, at the same time, lower awareness among the population calls for more active risk communication about the issue.

The study by Vilčinskas (2018) focuses on the understanding of nuclear risks discursively constructed by the political entities and government officials in Belarus and Lithuania. As a result, the author suggests that the issue frames found in the Lithuanian discourse tend to amplify the possible associated risks with the building of the Astravets Power Plant. At the same time, the issue frames found in the Belarusian discourse tend to attenuate the possible associated risks about the use of nuclear energy.

The *seventh group* of studies looks at the topics of trust, media space, and social institutions, such as the study by Krivolap (2018) which talks about the problem of lack of trust in the Belarusian media space which in turn results in difficulties with building the culture of trust and solidarity in the local society in general. The *eighth group* of studies investigates the issues of communication and folklore, such as the study by Astapova (2017). The study looks at the interplay of jokes, rumors, and other forms of

election folklore in Belarusian oral and online communication about politics and election frauds and attempts to show how these communication practices both reproduce and defy the system at the same time.

As has been shown in this section, a deep cultural perspective also tends to be lacking in the recent communication studies on Belarus. Moreover, this review shows that there have been no studies of Belarus, which employed Cultural Discourse (CuDA) and Ethnography of Communication (EOC) approaches. This gap is another reason for conducting such a study for the analysis of modern-day Belarusian culture as practiced in everyday communication and as reflected in discourse by Belarusians themselves.

1.3 Research questions and chapter overview

This dissertation consists of a series of analytical field reports which complement each other. Individual chapters separate the reports. Each of these separate field reports will serve as a core material for further publications in academic journals.

The first analytical chapter focuses on the cultural discourses of identity extracted from the interview data. The data for this chapter were collected during the participant observation in Minsk. I use these data to provide an explanatory framework with a set of cultural identities and discourses about the Belarusian cultural scene (the interview guide is available in Appendix A). In this analytical report, I extract various identities and categories of people from the cultural discourses about public creativity based on the series of ethnographic interviews. I also link the discursive categories found in the participant accounts with the local cultural and historical context in order to make the discursive categories meaningful for outsiders. The article based on this chapter has been

recently published online by the Journal of International and Intercultural Communication and is currently in press (Dinerstein, In Press).

This report addresses the following research question (RQ 1): *What cultural discourses about identity are active in relation to public creative practices in Belarus?* In this chapter, I describe six different cultural identities and four cultural groups found in the cultural discourse about identity and public creativity in Belarus, which I extracted from the interviews with cultural participants. I use this initial explanatory framework about the local identity to provide additional explanations for the data analyzed in other chapters of the dissertation.

I do this for two reasons. One is to bring additional insights to the explanations of what is observed at actual communication events of public creativity. Another is to test whether the categories about identity extracted from the interviews are applicable and/or to what extent they apply to the analysis and interpretation of actual communication events related to public creativity in Belarus. I had not merely the analytical purpose in mind but also the practical purpose of testing whether the explanatory framework is useful for the interpretation of particular Belarusian cultural practices. I also wanted to test whether these discursive categories about identity may be useful when explaining the speech community as a whole.

The second and third analytical chapters of this dissertation provide detailed cultural discourse analysis of an actual communication event – *Creative Mornings Minsk* – to capture the situated communication that happens within the event. Both chapters address the following research question (RQ 2): *How identity is cued and made relevant in communication that unfolds within the Belarusian practices of public creativity?*

However, each of the chapters addresses this question with a different focus. The second chapter focuses on the communication ritual of public creativity, while the third chapter investigates the cultural myths that the participants practice at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community. Thus, the second analytical chapter addresses the following research sub-question (RQ 2.1): *What are the characteristics and functions of communication at the Creative Mornings Minsk?* While the third analytical chapter addresses the following research sub-question (RQ 2.2): *What is the collective story the members of the Creative Mornings Minsk tell about themselves and the world they live in?*

One the one hand, this analysis renders cultural terms for talk and discursive categories focused on identity, which are employed by the participants when they involve in public creative practices. On the other hand, these chapters serve as a test for the initial categories of identity extracted from the interviews about public creativity and allow the researcher to see whether and to what extent these general categories of identity are applicable when analyzing particular communication events, in this case – *Creative Mornings Minsk.*

The final and fourth analytical chapter also addresses the second research question (RQ 2) and provides a set of ethnographic descriptions that have resulted from my participant observation in the field. These descriptions provide an example of how official state and unofficial independent cultural scenes intersect with each other resulting in the emergence of hybrid public spaces. Thus, I ask the following research sub-question for this chapter (RQ 2.3): *What are the social and cultural outcomes of public creativity in Belarus?*

This chapter complements the findings from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* and places them with the broader social context of urban festivals and related public creative practices in Belarus. Thus, one the one hand, I show in this dissertation what categories of identity are there in cultural discourse and how these categories are cued and made relevant in a particular communication event by the cultural participants. On the other hand, I also bring in examples of ostensible episodes from the Belarusian public life, which further visualize for the reader how these different identities from the discourse examined are related to Belarusian public life on a bigger scale. The idea here is to make connections between the micro-level of situated communication found at *Creative Mornings Minsk* and the macro level of the overall public life.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Ethnography of communication and cultural discourse analysis

To analyze how Belarusian society functions according to its cultural participants, I suggest taking Cultural Discourse and Ethnography of Communication theoretical perspectives, which are lacking in the existing academic pool of knowledge about the region. Ethnography of Communication (or speaking) (EOC) focuses on the ways culture is constructed and negotiated through various communicative means and meanings (Fitch, 2005, p. 323). To make sense of a culture, one should not merely document the behavior, but also understand what meanings the people attribute to this behavior (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005, p. 337). Craig (1999) argues that to study communication, one should focus on the ways it is practiced and reflexively accomplished in everyday situations (p. 129).

Ideally, such an approach should combine the study of language and the study of culture – a sociolinguistic approach to ethnography, as Hymes put it (1962; 1972). To interpret particular activity, to give it "deep" meaning, one must be familiar with the socially established code behind the particular situation (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Thus, in analyzing message contents, one should consider social structures where these messages and participants create a sense of their environments and activities (Hymes, 1964, p. 11). In many cases, when people engage in communication, they produce a meta-cultural commentary about their identities, relationships, feelings, actions, and dwelling (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168). This metacommentary may provide valuable insights into the ways culture is practiced and becomes meaningful for the members of a given speech

community. Moreover, a researcher should look at cultures through their communal conversation, which is a historically situated and ongoing communicative process where the participants construct, express, and negotiate the terms that are the foundation of their common social life (Philipsen, 2002, p. 53).

EOC work focuses on the data collected from naturally occurring events (Fitch, 2005). Leeds-Hurwitz (2005) attempts to summarize the basic premises of ethnography of both as a method of analysis and a means of reporting about the communities studied. The main idea is that an ethnographer is open and flexible to what happens in the field; ethnographic work is cyclical implying that initial ideas about the field may be amended and revised while the analyst is observing and participating in the field and learning the indigenous meanings of the cultural insiders (p. 328-332). When talking about the Ethnography as practiced in the area of Language and Social Interaction (LSI), the author points out that one should not simply document the behavior, but also understand what meanings the people attribute to this behavior (p. 337). The unique trait of EOC as compared to other types of ethnographic work is the shift of the focus from text or an individual speaker to interaction, meaning the shift toward the analysis of contextual and situated communication process (p. 342).

Thus, Philipsen and Coutu (2005) stress the importance of looking into the ways of speaking in context, concluding that EOC studies are studies of exploring (describing and theorizing about) the distinct ways of speaking that exist in various speech communities (p. 372). According to the scholars, the construct of the ways of speaking conjoins five interrelated constituent themes: (i) means of speaking; (ii) the meanings of the means of speaking; (iii) the situated use of the means of speaking as communicative

conduct; (iv) the speech community, and (v) the plurality of ways of speaking in a given speech community (p. 357). The scholars also stress the importance of interpreting the situations and uses of the ways of speaking based on how these situations and uses are interpreted and practiced by the cultural participants (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 361).

Ethnography of Communication, thus, originated as an approach that combines the study of language and the study of culture – a sociolinguistic approach to ethnography, as Hymes put it (1962; 1972). In his programmatic essay on the *ethnography of speaking*, Hymes (1962) considers speaking as an activity in its own right and is concerned with the situations and uses, the patterns and functions within social interactions (p. 16). Hymes (1962) argues that a semantic analysis that is a part of ethnography is necessary (p. 17). Such analysis should be more than merely a narrative of reality but should be a structural analysis of what one observes in the activity (Hymes, 1962, p. 19).

Hymes (1962) argues that speech cannot be omitted from a theory of human behavior; thus studies of speaking in context are required; a culture may have various ways of speaking based on a particular situation or based on which participants are involved in an activity (p. 44-45). The author offers a working framework to study speech in social use: (1) the speech of a group constitutes a system; (2) speech and language vary cross-culturally in function; (3) the speech activity of a community is the primary object of attention (Hymes, 1962, p. 47).

In further studies, Hymes (1964) points-out two characteristics of an adequate anthropological approach to language. First, such an approach cannot simply take the results from other disciplines, such as linguistics or sociology, and apply them in full to explain the patterns of the community (Hymes, 1964, p. 3). Instead, fresh data about the

community should be generated when analyzing activities in context (Hymes, 1964, p. 3). Second, such an approach cannot take a form of simply linguistic scrutiny, focused on speech itself as a frame of reference (Hymes, 1964, p. 3). Instead, a community should be taken as context, meaning that a researcher should investigate community habits as a whole, but not just focusing on some of its codes separately from the social practice of the community (Hymes, 1964, p. 3). Hymes (1964) suggests that this is "not linguistics, but ethnography – not language, but communication" (p. 3). Thus, this is a structural analysis of the communicative economy of a group (Hymes, 1964, p. 3).

To conduct such a structural analysis, one should investigate not only participants and message contents but also social structures where these messages and participants create a sense of their environments and activities (Hymes, 1964, p. 11). Besides, one should approach the cultural consequences of communication in historical and evolutionary terms (Hymes, 1964, p. 12). Thus, not only focusing on what is happening now but connecting it to a broader historical context on how a social group and its members, as well as how outside members refer to this community in historical perspective (Hymes, 1964, p. 12).

It seems that this is one of the points of connection of the Hymesian program with the Theory of Cultural Communication introduced by Philipsen (1987; 2002). Philipsen (2002) suggests looking at cultures through their communal conversation, which is a historically situated and ongoing communicative process where the participants construct, express, and negotiate the terms that are the foundation of their common social life (p. 53). Every communal conversation involves four features: 1) it is an ongoing communicative event; 2) the discussion is situated physically; 3) the discussion precedes

and outlives its current participants; 4) individuals enter the discussion only after they have figured out its nature (p. 54). A communal conversation is always conducted in and through particular means that are meaningful for the people who use and experience them (p. 55).

Hymes (1964) looks at communities as on systems of communicative events (p. 18). If there is a system, then one can observe that not all possible combinations of elements can occur; not all possible combinations of participants, topics, codes, and other elements can take place (Hymes, 1964, p. 18). In his later essay, Hymes (1972) argues that this is the reason why a new sociolinguistic approach to study communities is necessary, which will focus not on the language per se, but the speech community as a group involved in various kinds of language use – thus looking into interaction of language within social life (p. 51-53).

Hymes (1972) offers ways of describing speech communities based on the language in social use by looking into the key units and components that one can use to analyze a community (p. 53-65). Based on these units and components, the scholar introduces the SPEAKING analytical model (Hymes, 1972). The SPEAKING model allows looking at the society from several levels of conceptual units: *speech community* (refers to a social rather than linguistic entity, thus looking into all possible linguistic varieties within it and the norms for their interpretation and use); *speech situation* (refers to a variety of situations within the community which can be in some recognizable ways bounded or integral – ceremonies, political action, sporting events, etc.); *speech event* (a particular communicative activity that has beginning and end and thus can be distinguished from the wide array of the events that constitute a speech situation within a

speech community); *speech act* (a particular communicative act within a speech event – a smile, a wink, a blink, a clap, a greeting, etc.); *speech styles* (refers to the particular ways of speaking regarding a particular social space – formal or informal language use, forms of address, volume of speech, forms of conduct, etc.) (p. 53-58).

In addition to the units of analysis, Hymes (1972) proposes a set of key components of speech that refer to the message form (how something is communicated) and message content (what is communicated) in a particular activity (p. 58-60) These components constitute the SPEAKING mnemonic: *setting* (physical circumstances); *scene* (participant's interpretation of what is going on); *participants* (who is involved into the activity); *ends* (goals and outcomes of the activity); *acts* (act, act sequences, act content and form); *key* (tone, pitch, feeling: formal, informal, festive, etc.); *instruments* (channel of communication); *norms* (rules for interaction: what should be done; rules of interpretation: how to understand what is being done from the participant's point of view; what is significant and vital in this interaction for the participants themselves); *genre* (a type of the interaction – a poem, a lecture, a play, a performance, a business meeting, etc.) (Hymes, 1972, p. 60-65).

The Hymesian approach to study communication and culture suggests a particular conceptualization of the speech community, where language, society, and rhetoric are conjoined (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 48). Thus, the language, in this case, stands for all the possible means of speaking (or communicating), society stands for a particular social group where this communication is happening, and rhetoric points to the purposive use of various means and ends by the participants in the process of communication (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005, p. 48).

Ethnography of Communication as an approach to study communication and culture has developed further drawing on Hymesian (1972) theoretical framework. Some of the major theoretical developments are probably The Theory of Cultural Communication (Philipsen, 1987; 2002), The Speech Codes Theory (Philipsen, Coutu & Covarrubias, 2005), and The Cultural Discourse Theory (CDT) and Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) (Carbaugh, 2007).

Thus, Philipsen (1987) suggests three perspectives on describing culture: 1) culture as *code* – examining a system of beliefs, values, and images of the ideal where code is a source of social order and fixation; 2) culture as *conversation* – examining patterns of representation of the people's lived experiences of work, play, and worship, where conversation is a source of dynamism and cultural creativity; 3) culture as *community* – examining human groupings based on shared identity which is drawn from the communal orderings of memories or the memory traces of the group past, where communities are seen as settings and scenes where the communal conversation occurs based on the codes that are learned (p. 249).

The main function of cultural communication is to maintain the balance between the forces of *individualism* and *communality*, which may be achieved by balancing between the sub-processes of 1) *creation* and 2) *affirmation* of shared identity (Philipsen, 1987, p. 249). "Cultural communication is the process by which a code is realized and negotiated in a communal conversation. It includes the process of enactment […] and creation […]" (p. 249). A culture, thus, may be found on the different points along the communal-personal axis based on how the sub-processes of enactment and creation are balanced (p. 249).

Later, Philipsen (2002) outlines two general principles of cultural communication that are related to two aspects of human life: 1) culturally distinctive ways of communicating and 2) the role of communication in performing the cultural, or communal, function (p. 51). This outline brings the two important strands on culture and communication: 1) differences in communicative practices across various groups and 2) the role of communication in discursively maintaining the individual-communal dialectic (p. 53).

Further, Philipsen (2002) introduces the axiom of cultural particularity, which states that "the efficacious resources for creating shared meaning and motivating coordinated action vary across social groups" (p. 56). This axiom leads to the formulation of the speech codes theory, which argues that there are culturally unique codes for communication conduct across societies and that distinctive communal conversations may be interpreted by taking into account unique codes of communication that are present in each of these conversations (p. 55). A speech code itself consists of historically enacted, socially constructed systems of terms, meanings, premises, and rules of communicative conduct (p. 56). Thus, every communal conversation is unique in regard to the speech codes that are enacted in it (p. 56).

The general theoretical formulation of cultural communication can be summarized in three parts: 1) cultural communication performs the cultural function; 2) communication is a performative resource in doing cultural work in society; 3) cultural function is performed differently in different communal conversations (Philipsen, 2002, p. 60).

Cultural Discourse Theory (CDT) and Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) tradition takes its theoretical origin from the Hymesian program and stands at the juncture of the theories of Cultural Communication and Communication Codes (Speech Codes Theory) (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168).

Speech codes theory has been created for two main reasons: 1) to make a synthesis from the previous ethnography of communication studies and 2) to provide a focus for the future research in the field of cultural communication (Philipsen, G., Coutu, L. & Covarrubias, P., 2005, p. 56).

As a theory of communication, speech codes theory has three main characteristics: 1) it is focused on observing communication that occurs in particular times and places; 2) it focuses on observing and explaining situated codes of meaning and value in the communication process; 3) it provides a general understanding of communicative conduct (Philipsen et al., 2005, p. 56-57). While Cultural Communication Theory looks at communication and communal conversation as at constituting, reproducing, and transforming culture in general, Speech Codes Theory focuses more on the particular communication codes that are present in various communication events and activities, as well as in the cultural discourses about these events and activities.

The key concept in the Speech Codes Theory is code, which means not something fixed in time and space, but a system of socially constructed symbols, meanings, premises, and rules that are active in the communicative conduct (Philipsen et al., 2005, p. 57). In addition, the theory considers culture as code, meaning that culture is not something located geographically, fixed, and deterministic, but rather is a unique,

dynamic, and socially constructed system, a life-world (p. 58; 64-65). Culture and codes thus have limits in shaping and determining social life (p. 64).

There are six propositions of speech codes theory that are based on the extensive record of fieldwork data: 1) every culture is constructed of codes and the codes are distinctive in distinct cultures; 2) in every given speech community, multiple speech codes are at play simultaneously; 3) a speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology (meanings about human nature), sociology (meanings about social relations), and rhetoric (meanings about strategic conduct); 4) the significance of speaking is contingent upon the speech codes used by interlocutors to constitute the meanings of communicative acts; 5) symbols, meanings, premises, and rules about communicative conduct (speech code) are woven into the communicative conduct (speaking) itself; 6) "the artful use of a shared speech code is a sufficient condition for predicting, explaining, and controlling the form of discourse about the intelligibility, prudence, and morality of communicative action" (Philipsen et al., 2005, p. 58-63).

Speech codes theory considers culture as an open-ended system where its participants reflect in the discourse what is important to them and how they are related to what is important to them (Philipsen et al., 2005, p. 64), which is concordant with some of the premises of the Cultural Discourse Theory (CDT).

The CDT framework treats communication both as its primary data and theoretical concern and is a way to implement an analysis based on the theory of communication codes (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 167). Specifically, it proposes to base an investigative procedure on the theoretical, descriptive, interpretive, comparative, and critical analytical modes (p. 167).

Cultural discourse is defined as a "historically transmitted expressive system of communication practices, of acts, events, and styles, which are composed of specific symbols, symbolic forms, norms, and their meanings" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 169). The general question raised by CuDA is "how communication is shaped as a cultural practice?" (p. 169-170).

The framework uses indigenous interpretations of the local communication practices as conducted, perceived, and evaluated by the participants of a particular culture, thus looking into the cultural meta-commentary produced by the natives about communicative practices they are involved in (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168). This mode of inquiry is based on the premise that communication both presumes and constitutes social realities; moreover, it argues that when the people engage in communication, they produce a meta-cultural commentary about their identities, relationships, feelings, acting, and dwelling (p. 168).

Interpretive analytical mode specifically looks into the elements that indicate cultural significance and importance to the participants of the communication practice, as well as looks into the range of active meanings that are present in and about the particular practice for its participants (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 173-174). The researcher should focus on the *hubs* and *radiants* of meaning that are present in cultural discourse enacted in and about the practice to understand what the practice is and how it is possible, based on the meta-cultural commentary (p. 174).

CuDA studies are designed to allow theorizing about communication in general and to provide the basis for further studies, providing detailed descriptions of communication practices under scrutiny, and interpreting these practices from the

standpoint of their participants (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 179). Ethnography of Communication and CDT allow linking micro levels of meaning found in situated interactions and cultural meta-commentary with macro-level of social structures where these interactions and meta-cultural commentary unfold and which they refer to. Thus, eventually allowing making important conclusions about the culture and its multifaceted dynamics.

These more recent developments in the EOC add to the initial Hymesian approach by not merely stressing the importance of communicative action as a part of various social and cultural activities, but also suggesting that communication is central to constituting, transforming, and reproducing culture. Also, communication is considered a source of knowledge and information about the ways culture is meaningful for the participants of speech communities. Since the meanings of the various forms of cultural participation are reflected in communication, one may infer these meanings from cultural discourses and various communication codes found in and about a wide array of activities where cultural participants take part.

2.2 Review of related literature on culture, identity, and change

In addition to the general theoretical perspective described above, this study will draw on the literature, which focuses on the concepts of culture, identity, creativity, and change. Approaching culture from the standpoint of communication means approaching culture as a dynamic, creative, and transformative process, where the meanings about belonging, identities, and relationships are constantly and continuously negotiated through various means. “Cultural communication is the process by which a code is realized and negotiated in a communal conversation. It includes the process of enactment […] and creation […]” (Philipsen, 1987, p. 249). Cultural codes in communication are

not static systems, but rather are dynamic and, thus, are created, maintained, and challenged in the context of competing codes (Coutu, 2000, p. 207).

My particular interest in studying culture form such a communication perspective is in looking into how social change and cultural transformation unfold. Specifically, I look at public creative practices and social transformation in Belarus, my native country. Most frequently, when talking about social change and transformation, scholars turn to the traditions of social movements (Sztompka, 1994), or the practices of resistance (Scott, 2013), or the study of oppression, power, and dominance (Fairclaugh, 1995; Blomaert & Bulcaen, 2000; van Dijk, 2015), cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), habitus and social trajectories (Bourdieu, 1984), discursive formations (Foucault, 1972), and so on. While these approaches are concerned with many important and sensitive issues about change and transformation in society, they all start with the premise that there is some kind of inequality that has to be overcome to achieve the social change or to transform the existing culture. However, such frameworks omit one important nuance that cultural change and transformation by themselves are organic and highly creative processes that are universal to all environments.

For this reason, I argue that one should start not with inequality, but rather try to understand the local logic behind the cultural forms that are observed and described in a given community before applying any explanatory frameworks to the processes that happen in that community. To locate any transformative processes in a given culture, one should be able to grasp the local cultural logic, which renders the cultural participants and the activities they are involved in as meaningful from their own standpoint. Such knowledge and understanding allow one to see how various social and cultural changes

become possible and how the existing social and cultural order is enacted, shared, and maintained via various means. And then, and only then, one may turn to the various critical approaches mentioned above if they are found relevant to the particular situation.

Some of the most common universal forms and processes through which cultural transformation and social change may be observed are *rituals* and *social dramas*. Ritual, according to Turner (1980), allows to increase social reflexivity, initiating the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand itself, and then act on itself (p. 156). Turner sees social dramas as a process of converting particular values and ends into a system of shared consensual meaning (p. 156). The concept of meaning always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history (p. 156); during the redressive phase, the values and ends may be transformed or reiterated based on the retrospective reflexivity about the common social life, thus transforming or reiterating the pre-breach social order.

Social structure is not static but instead is being reiterated or transformed continuously through the redressive process in social dramas. Rituals have a transformative capacity for groups and societies and nearly always "accompany transitions from one situation to another and from one cosmic or social world to another" (Turner, 1980, p. 160). According to Turner (1980), any definition of ritual should take into account *liminality*, which involves transformative action; otherwise, ritual becomes indistinguishable from the ceremony; *ceremony* indicates, while *ritual* transforms (p. 161).

It is in the liminal phase when new meanings and symbols about the models of living can be introduced or can be reintroduced in a new light, thus renewing interest in them (p. 165). Ritual liminality contains the potentiality for cultural innovation and the

means of effecting structural transformations within the existing cultural order; it allows to create a meaningful continuity, a relationship of the experiences of the common past with the experiences of the common present (p. 165-167).

Since rituals and social dramas open the possibility to change through the liminal process and since participation in the communal conversation means learning certain standards for action, I argue, that any repetitive novel forms in the society should bear with them traces of social transformation and change. The appearance of novel forms requires rethinking and reassembly of the social order as presently constituted. When the novel forms are continuously reiterated, as public creativity in Belarus today, one may argue that they indicate the change in the standards for action in a given culture since they are publicly ostensible, publicly shared, and publicly practiced. Thus, they become a part of the ongoing communal conversation and indicate certain transformations that are happening in the culture and society. Such novel forms are both indicating the change and maintaining this change through the recreation of the new standards for action and new forms of relating among the cultural participants, thus leading to the emergence and establishment of new social and cultural routines. These routines become new "traditional" forms of social and cultural actions within the group or community, which are practiced at this point.

Any culture involves participants with shared and distinct identities. However, the concept of identity is complex. Identity refers to something that lies at the core of everyone's selfhood and at the same time may be seen as a dynamic and fragmented process, as an accomplishment that is performed or enacted by an individual or a group in each particular scene and setting (Tracy, 2002, p. 17). Identities are also created and

maintained through local discourse contexts of interaction; they are discursive constructs that emerge from these interactions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 585-586). In multiethnic communities, group members may switch among the various cultural identities available to them in a given environment by using various cultural codes in the interaction (Bailey, 2001, p. 197).

Identities are both preexistent to a particular situation and constituted in that situation through interaction or symbolic exchange (Tracy, 2002, p. 17). Identities can be *ratified*, *contested*, or *rejected* in interactions and communication practices (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 146).

Carbaugh (1996) mentions three central concepts of entities to whom various types of identities can be ascribed: "*Individual*," "*self*," "*person*" (p. 3). *Individual* refers to the physiological and biological entity; *self* refers to the social entity which is enacted, reiterated, and constructed in and through interactions with other individuals within the social context; the *person* is a complex abstraction and cultural construct that refers to a certain class of subjects defined by certain key attributes that belong to this class (p. 3-11).

Kroskrity (2000) argues that identities can be divided into national, ethnic, racial, class and rank, and gender identities (p. 111). These identities are not exclusive to one of another, they interact on multiple levels, and thus people usually experience what Kroskrity (2000) calls the *repertoires of identity* (p. 112). Identities may also be situational – the group members establish which of the multiple identities are situationally relevant and which ones should or are being enacted within the interaction (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 113). The choice among the repertoires of identities involves both individual

autonomous agency and social structure; thus, one is not entirely free in enacting or plying out a particular identity; however, one is also not fully restrained by the outside environment either (p. 113).

Each identity is *positioned* in a particular discourse (Hall, 1990; Carbaugh, 1996). Such positioning may be based on both similarities and differences that exist in certain discourses about social, cultural, ethnic, and national groups (Hall, 1990, p. 222-227). Both what people share and what they share not as a group allows them to form a particular collective identity (p. 226-227).

It is essential to add that group identities are maintained not simply by the interactions and narratives that originate from within the group and that are offered by the outsiders; group identities also form through the interactions with the outside members (Barth, 1969, p. 14). In these interactions, the members of each group establish and reinforce their own identities in relation to the identities of outsiders (Barth, 1969, p. 14). Such interactions allow group members to distinguish themselves from the members of other groups (Barth, 1969, p. 14-15).

Social and cultural identities are *situated communication practices* (Carbaugh, 1996, 24). According to Carbaugh (1996), social and cultural identities, as well as their place within the social structure, can be found in discourse and cultural metacommentary that group members produce about their everyday practices as social and cultural agents (p. 29-30). Such cultural meta-commentaries bear the traces of meanings about the ways people in a given group or community relate to each other and the society at large through their acting, feeling, and dwelling within this community (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 28-29).

Such cultural discourses show what does it mean to belong to a particular group and what does it mean to have specific social and cultural identities in a given culture – this is a way for the group members to communicate the rules for maintaining and enacting identities through various *communication forms* to each other and outsiders (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 33-34). Some of the most common generic communication forms are *myths*, *rituals*, and *social dramas* (Carbaugh, 1996, p. 33).

The notion of identity as a situated communication practice that is positioned in the particular discourse and which is maintained, enacted, and transformed through generic communication forms may help approach how collective creative practices in Belarus serve as a ground for social transformation and identity formation.

Both Turner (1980) and Philipsen (2002) suggest that culture possesses the potentiality to change and transformation. Turner (1980) argues that this transformation results from ritual and social-dramatic processes that happen through liminality. Philipsen (2002) suggests that communal conversation may be seen as a source of dynamism and cultural creativity. Since cultural practice is public and it serves both as a source of knowledge about the culture and as a means of creation of cultural knowledge, creativity and the emergence of new cultural forms is a natural process of cultural communication. Thus, looking at the juncture where old cultural forms start to be complemented or supplanted by the new cultural forms allows tracing the process of cultural creativity and social transformation, which is happening in a given community.

Since the creation and affirmation of cultural meaning and identities is a continuous process across the society, the communal conversation should be ripe with the moments of liminality. Since not all such moments may be ostensible for the observer, or

even for the cultural participant, I find art and public creative practices in Belarus an ostensible example of such a liminal moment within the Belarusian society. Public performance and street-culture maintain within them a possibility of liminality, as they produce moments when people are "betwixt and between" and due to this, are open to change (Simpson, 2011, p. 415-416). Such cultural practices may potentially transform the urban environment and become an "expanding practice of solidarity […] through which difference and multiplicity can be mobilized for common gain and against harm and want" (Amin, 2006, p. 1020-1021).

The venues of public creativity, thus, may become liminal spaces with the potentiality for cultural creativity and social transformation. Cultural creativity, in this case, may come out of liminality and, thus, involves transformative action through the "self-immolation of order as presently constituted" (Turner, 1980, p. 161-164). Such public creative practices include, but are not limited to, urban festivals and various communities that group around creative hubs, startup conventions, and street art, thus creating specific forms of communal conversation through the emergence and reiteration of these cultural forms. These cultural forms somewhat resemble Bakhtin's (1968) marketplace, where the behaviors and practices otherwise prohibited and proscribed might be manifested.

However, since such public creativity in Belarus happens all-year-round, it allows for such alternative practices and behaviors to form regular social routines and social order, which are different from those previously constituted. Thus, such novel forms have the traces of cultural creativity within them – it is not simply about artistic expression, and even not about art as a collective action that leads to the emergence of new cultural

forms – it is about the process of cultural creativity in general, where public creative practices and art become just one of the many liminal sites where cultural and social change may be traced and observed.

There is another important strand of literature that might help render and explain through what exact means such cultural forms as pubic creativity in Belarus become sites for cultural transformation and change. Some of the studies in the EOC field have shown that the idea of "communication" as a cultural category has cultural peculiarities and thus should be explained in the local cultural context. It suggests that ostensibly similar communication events may have distinct cultural roles and meanings in distinct speech communities.

Thus, a study by Katriel & Philipsen (1981) examined "communication" as a cultural term based on the ethnographic analysis of "communication" as of recurring public drama that is present on the Phil Donahue TV-program. The primary purpose of this study was to problematize the meaning of "communication" in some U.S. texts by exploring the individual meanings of "communication" in the interpersonal context (p. 301).

The main distinction found in the accounts about "communication" was a juxtaposition of the "real communication" and "small talk" (p. 303). While the first concept referred to something deep and intimate, the second concept referred to something shallow and impersonal; "real communication" is about the interpenetration of the "personal spaces," while "small talk" is not (p. 303). "Communication" is also something that involves "self-definition" and brings the potentiality to change (p. 303-

304). “Communication” can be “open” when it refers to “really talking” and “mere talk” when it refers to “normal chit-chat” (p. 306-307).

Based on these findings, the researchers introduce their own metaphor for “communication” – the “communication” as “ritual,” because there is a particular sequence of how one becomes involved in “real communication” (p. 310-311). The researchers outline the basic ingredients of the “communication” ritual using Hymes’s categories of topic, purpose, participants, act sequence, setting, and norm of interaction to describe the ritualistic sequence of “sit down and talk,” “work out problems,” and “discuss our relationship” which is *intelligible to* many Americans (p. 311-316).

Inspired by this approach to exploring “communication” as a cultural term, a study by Kluykanov & Leontovich (2017) has addressed a similar issue in the Russian context focusing on the distinction between the culturally specific forms of communication called *obschenie* and *kommunikatciya.* According to this study (Kluykanov & Leontovich, 2017), the practice of *obschenie* usually involves sharing something with other participants, such as time, money, food, and drink (p. 32), but this is far from a complete list of what one could share during such practice. Participants may share emotions, feelings, secrets, doubts, concerns, and other things – *obschenie* involves a broad spectrum of things that one may share during the practice, and usually, there is more than one thing which is shared. Klyuakanov & Leontovich (2017) argue that *obschenie* refers to the maintenance of community and fellowship (in time), while *kommunikatciya* refers more to the information exchange (through space) (p. 33).

Additionally, a study by Alexei Yurchak (2005) looked at the concept of *obschenie* from the historical perspective, applying it to the public practices of the Soviet

period of the 1960s. Yurchak argues, that the practice of *obschenie* allowed to reshape and transform the existing order of things of the time, thus producing the worlds that existed outside of the Soviet regime and which introduced different spatiality, temporality, thematic, and meaningfulness into the social life (p. 150). *Obschenie* resulted in a new form of sociality and personhood that went beyond the personal and the social, and where togetherness was a central value in itself (p. 151).

These brief excerpts from the previous studies point to the importance of considering the local cultural specifics of how people practice communication and how "communication" as a term for talk is perceived and conceptualized by locals. In my analysis, I approach the discursive categories used by the Belarusian cultural participants in and about the communication events of cultural creativity, keeping in mind this perspective. I consider that while some practices and concepts may seem familiar to the observer, they may have completely unexpected or drastically distinctive meanings when encountered in other cultural contexts.

Hymes (1964) suggested that one should consider speech communities as systems of communication events (p. 18). In this dissertation, I focus on the communication events of public creativity. I also focus on the meta-cultural commentary about identity found in communication in and about such events. The analysis that I present in this study investigates the Belarusian *community* through its *communal conversation* which is not only based on and interpreted through the current cultural discourses, but also the land's previous historical and cultural record.

According to Carbaugh's (2007) Cultural Discourse (CuDA) approach, focusing on the meta-cultural commentary produced by the natives about communication practices

they are involved in allows operating with the indigenous interpretations of local communication practices as conducted, perceived, and evaluated by the participants of a particular culture (p. 168). I follow the premise that communication both presumes and constitutes social realities, and that the participants reflect on indigenous notions about identities, relationships, feelings, acting, and dwelling in the cultural discourses (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168). I focus on meta-cultural commentary about the communication practices of public creativity and related forms of collective action to provide a snapshot of current Belarusian culture with the corresponding cultural identities as perceived, conducted, and evaluated by its participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

3.1 Data collection procedures

I collected the data for this study via both participant observation and in-depth ethnographic interviews. The observation took place in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, during May-November 2016 and May-August 2017, 2018, and 2019 – a total of 19 months of fieldwork observations. Philipsen (2009) suggests that approximately one-year of full-rime fieldwork is a typical period for the onsite research and data collection (p. 97).

The current data corpus consists of 12 pages of ethnographic fieldnotes, approximately 40 pages of field reflection papers, approximately 50 hours of video recordings, and 10 in-depth semi-structured open-ended interviews conducted during the May-August 2017 observation period.

Even though informant accounts may be a valuable source of information about various types of activities, the researchers should be skeptical about such accounts, especially when conducting observations in cultures others than their own (Grimshaw, 1974, p. 419-420). Studying interactions and situated communication allows diminishing the discrepancy between the people's accounts and actual behaviors they involve in (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014, p. 186). However, this does not mean that participant accounts are not useful. What is reported by the cultural participants in such accounts may be validated or disregarded when observing the actual situated behaviors of cultural participants and comparing these behaviors against their accounts (Jerolmack & Khan,

2014, p. 195). However, “natural” speech and other communicative behavior observed in natural settings suit best for the sake of exploratory adequacy (Grimshaw, 1974, p. 421).

For these reasons, I attended various public creative events both as a spectator and active participant to collect video data and to create an additional corpus illustrating the activities and interactions that happen at various public creative events in Minsk. During the initial preliminary observation, I used my smartphone to record the data in public places and made occasional fieldnotes to reflect on the videotaped events, spaces, practices, and interactions. I stored the videos and field notes on my computer in a digital format.

I also have downloaded video recordings from 17 sessions of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* meetings, a recently uploaded documentary on *Art-Siadziba* and Belarusian-language grassroots initiatives in the country, a media report on the Belarusian street music performance, a documentary and a video account on the *Vulica Brazil* urban art festival. I also have read over 40 mass media opinion articles that are in one way or another related to arts, culture, and entrepreneurship while saving the URLs of the most comprehensive articles to add to my overall data corpus. Selected excerpts from these data were analyzed based on the EOC perspective and by applying CuDA methodology.

The events attended during my participant observation were urban festivals (such as *Peshehodka, Vulica Brazil, Eco-Fest Pasternak,* and others – (approximately 300 hours)), public talks and business forums (such as *Creative Mornings Minsk, CreateIT*, and others – (approximately 40 hours)), literature and poetry recitals (such as *Eshafot, Ruhavik, Vershy by Kava, NoTouch*, and others – (approximately 40 hours)), public discussions and performances organized by the particular art- and business-hubs (such as *Kislorod*,

Space, Korpus8, Ў-Gallery, ЦЭХ, and others – (approximately 30 hours)), as well as other venues and events in Minsk (approximately 20 hours).

The interviews were videotaped for further analysis and transcription. Ten interlocutors for 1-hour long interviews were recruited from my personal network of contacts and via recommendations by other cultural insiders. The research participants were recruited among the current artists, independent event organizers, entrepreneurs, and producers, as well as among the individuals not directly related to the public creative practices. Following institutional review board (IRB) protocols, I have assigned pseudonyms and random two-letter codes to each interlocutor to secure their real identities. The interview data have been stored in a secure folder on my computer to prevent unauthorized access.

Cultural participants tend to provide meta-communicative commentary about their identities, relationships, feelings, acting, and dwelling within the community when involved in a communicative activity (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 168). Thus, transcripts and participant accounts are good sources for such meta-communicative commentary, especially when backed by video, where the commentary is directly related to the activities where the participants are involved.

Additionally, videotaping the unfolding field activities seems to be a more efficient way of reporting about the field than taking field notes. Thus, according to Agar (1980), fieldnotes are overrated (p. 112). The first dilemma with using the fieldnotes is that an ethnographer usually does not know what exactly to record when just entering the field (p. 112). Writing down fieldnotes also restricts the researcher from observing what is going on around and may lead to omitting some important occurrences that happen

around (p. 112). Additionally, writing things down at the end of the day may also be a tricky exercise, since it may be difficult to restore the events and especially conversations form one's memory (p. 112). Field notes, in this sense, are a problem that may lead to interrupting the observation and distorting the events when retrieving them from the long-term memory (p. 113). For this reason, when possible, video-recording seems a more efficient alternative to fieldnotes as a method of recording the unfolding field activities and events.

3.2 Subjectivity and positionality statement

I am a native of Belarus and was born at the end of Perestroika in 1987. I was four years old when the Soviet Union collapsed. Like everyone from my generation, I lived through the social, cultural, and economic crises and drastic changes that happened in the 1990s. I was seven when the Belarusians elected their current president who capitalized on the people's nostalgia over the Soviet times. He is still in power, twenty-six years after his initial election.

Throughout the 1990s I was also able to immerse myself into a very vibrant cultural life in Minsk. My parents were among the pioneers of Belarusian show business and I had enormous opportunities to observe those forms of leisure and sociality. I was able to observe how multiple active people, mostly young, in their 20s through 40s, did something that was not seen and practiced before.

For me it was a natural environment, for my parents it was business and an opportunity to make a change and to immerse themselves into something new. The idea of business as a social practice was also something new at those times and it was not clear how it was to be done. I was able to observe the daily routines of the *Alternative Theater*

and *Class-Club* producer center – the independent initiatives which became one of the spaces that transformed Belarusian cultural life in the 1990s. However, this vibrant life went into decline as more and more restrictions have been introduced by the newly elected Belarusian president.

There was a period of relative 'silence' in the local public life for about fifteen years until the recent proliferation of public creative practices. This new wave reminded me about the creative and cultural scenes of the 1990s and I decided to look closer at these practices and at the people who are involved in them. I did not know specifically what I was looking for, but it felt very unusual to suddenly have such an abundant public life around me. Last time I had such a feeling was back in the 1990s, when I was a teenager. This is one of the reasons I decided to approach the topic of public creativity discussed in this study.

3.3 Analytical procedures

I created interview logs and transcribed parts of the interviews, which included the discourse about identities concerning the public creative practices and events discussed by research participants. I selected this discourse of identity for detailed analysis as a result of a pilot study which yielded its prominence in these data. These parts resulted in approximately 20 pages of data that have been analyzed. Further, I translated the selected interview parts from Russian and Belarusian languages into English. I analyzed these as the primary data source for the Cultural Discourse Analysis procedure, which allowed me to extract discursive categories of six cultural identities and four cultural groups from the cultural discourse about public creativity in Belarus. These groups and categories constitute an exploratory framework that I explicate in this dissertation in more detail. I

apply these discursive categories to the interpretation of situated communication from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* project. I also apply them to the ethnographic descriptions of the creative scenes used as parts of my analysis in this study.

According to the CuDA analytical procedure, in order to understand what the practice is and how it is possible, based on cultural discourse, the researcher should analyze the discursive *hubs* first and then interpret the *radiants* of meaning to explicate meta-cultural commentary enacted in and about the practice (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 174). There are five major hubs and radiants of meaning that are offered by CuDA: being or identity, relationship, feeling, acting, and dwelling (p. 168). In this dissertation, I focus on the hub of *identity/being,* which is expressed and characterized by the research participants through the radiants of *acting* and *relating*. CuDA is not limited to solemnly the study of transcripts and may include participant observation as a part of the study. Observations may be done to understand the routine communication practices in their originating place, in their indigenous terms and meanings for their participants (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 15-17).

Additionally, Carbaugh (2017) offers a theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing terms for talk to complement the CuDA procedure. This framework is suggested for interpretation and analysis of parts of discourse which contain participants' accounts about their talk and communication in general (Carbaugh, 2017, p. 17). Participants may contemplate their actions with specific cultural terms (p. 17). These terms may imply local assumptions about what has been said or done and how these actions are related to certain culturally specific ways of being, feeling, relating, and dwelling in this speech community (p. 17). Focusing on such culturally meaningful terms for talk allows reaching a deeper understanding of implicit cultural meanings that are

captured by the cultural discourse and might be very useful for the interpretation of such cultural concepts as *obschenie,* for example.

Following the CuDA analytical framework, the analysis in this dissertation is based on, first, the terms participants use when they speak and then, the formulation of *cultural propositions* which link those terms to statements of participant beliefs and/or values: *cultural premises*. These propositions and premises, when focused on the radiants of the hub of identity, serve as the substance for analyzing meta-cultural commentary and offer a perspective for explaining *symbols* and *cultural key terms*. Since I am looking at the cultural key terms in the discourse, the unit of analysis is a discursive unit, not an individual.

The data are interpreted based on the informants' own terms. Some of the terms are further explicated with additional cultural and historical background. Although the role of the ethnographer is to interpret based on indigenous terms (Philipsen, 1990, pp. 258–259), criticism is possible in the ethnography of communication studies (Carbaugh, 1990, p. 264) and may be applied through the *natural*, *academic*, and *cultural criticism* (p. 267–372); the three types of criticism found in this study.

In this dissertation, I present the findings as a series of cultural premises, or meanings that have been found most active in the identity discourse. Following CuDA analytical procedure, each premise is explicated in more detail with cultural propositions that elaborate the meanings in each premise. Additional historical and cultural background is provided as a structural context for the meanings presented in discourse based on the cultural premises, cultural propositions, and interview excerpts. The analysis concludes with a discussion of the cultural identities and their relationship to the cultural scenes

examined and provides a detailed account of the modern-day Belarusian culture as perceived and reflected in communication by the participants of the grassroots independent initiatives that involve the phenomena of public creativity.

More specifically, the CuDA analytical procedure in this dissertation was based on the following steps:

1. I transcribed all the audio- and video-recorded material focusing on the discursive hub of identity, thus creating general descriptive outlines of conversations and interactions, and made similar outlines of other data I have from my participant observations
2. In these created outlines, I identified the segments of data where participants cue the discursive hub of identity with the emphasis on the radiants of acting and relating. It is during this phase I moved from the descriptive toward the interpretive analysis based on the CuDA methodology. I examined the data for *cultural terms* which play a key role in participant's speech and which can be examined as symbolically potent and expressively meaningful
3. When selected and identified the key terms in the cultural discourse about identity, I returned to a descriptive mode and made detailed verbatim transcriptions of these discursive segments
4. Within these detailed transcripts, I focused on extracting clusters of cultural terms that occur in connection to the hub of identity and mapped these clusters
5. I articulated the meanings of the key terms about identity and related clusters, as well as relationships among them in order to start formulating *cultural*

propositions – taken for granted statements of belief and value as expressed by the cultural participants in relation to the public creative practices in Belarus

6. I asked what must be presumed about identity, when thought of with the focus on acting and relating, for participant's communicative actions to be coherent. During this phase, I started formulating *cultural premises* – more general and abstract statements of belief and value that capture the essence of the terms and propositions previously identified in the meta-cultural commentary. The key terms, propositions, and premises from the discourse examined were analyzed in relation to the explicit hub of identity and implicit radiants of acting and relating. When required, other analytic concepts from cultural communication, speech codes theory, and cultural discourse analysis were applied to the interpretive report (e.g., *myth*, *ritual, social drama, liminality, oppositional codes,* etc.). Additional analytic concepts related to the local cultural scene were also introduced when necessary (e.g., *obschenie, tuteyshiya, tusovka, tvorchestvo, vnye,* etc.)

The process of analysis was not strictly unidirectional. I have periodically cycled back through several modes to revisit my conceptual framework. I did it to see whether adjustments are necessary and to revisit my data and fieldnotes to see whether additional field observations are required to check against the interview accounts or my interpretations of the cultural terms examined. The purpose of this cyclical analytical approach was to refine my findings and interpretations from multiple perspectives and in broader contexts.

Various scholars describe ethnographic research as a cyclical investigative enterprise (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992; Abbot, 2004; Leeds-Hurwitz, 2005). Same is true for the Ethnography of Communication studies, which focus on the discovery of local cultural meanings, symbols, and symbolic forms that participants themselves consider as important and that are found in the ongoing communication and social interactions in a given speech community (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992, p. 157). Ethnography of Communication (or speaking), thus, focuses on the ways culture is constructed and negotiated through various communicative means and meanings (Fitch, 2005, p. 323), while ethnographers of communication train their "eyes and ears to local means of communicating, and to local system of meanings associated with those means" (Philipsen, 2009, p. 88).

According to Carbaugh & Hastings (1992), such ethnographic research consists of three general phases: pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork (p. 158). The research process also involves four phases of theorizing that are cyclically applied to the ethnographic study and which can be described using the BASE mnemonic: 1) basic orientation (B); 2) activity theory (A); 3) situated theory (S); 4) evaluation and/or evolution of theory (E) (p. 163). I will now talk about each of the general and theorizing phases of ethnography in more detail.

The pre-fieldwork phase usually involves three kinds of reading about the field: 1) reading about ethnographic theory and method; 2) reading about particular problems and social phenomena; 3) reading about the local setting and scene (p. 158). The fieldwork phase is often exploratory (p. 158). The ethnographer's purpose is to learn and acquire some knowledge that was not available before entering the field (Agar, 1980, p. 77). The

emphasis of ethnographic work is to understand the behaviors encountered in the field (p. 190). One of the ways to achieve such understanding is by living within the situations one studies, to participate in them to some extent (Abbot, 2004, p. 15). Such participation usually involves generating data (observations, interviews, collection of documents, etc.), recording data (transcribing, audio and video recording, field notes, etc.), analyzing data (employing various quantitative and qualitative techniques), and the continued reading about theory, method, problems, and the field (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992, p. 158).

Fieldwork is also done with an open and investigative approach, considering the orientations developed before entering the field and during the pre-fieldwork studies (p. 158). Usually, the researcher does not have fully developed questions before entering the field and navigates the field based on the initial general puzzles or problems (Abbot, 2004, p. 16).

The post-fieldwork phase continues with the analysis began in the field and with the intense writing based on the data and fieldnotes (Carbaugh & Hastings, 1992, p. 158). Going through all the stages does not mean that the ethnographic process ends at this point – each stage of the investigation, when completed, may become a potential return point back to the field or into the readings about the field if required (p. 159). All this illustrates how ethnography is, on the one hand, a linear process, and on the other hand, a cyclical enterprise (p. 159).

Ethnography is not merely a collection of data, but it is also a specific way of theorizing about the field and communication in general (p. 159). The first phase of theorizing involves basic theoretic orientation (B) and conceptual assumptions about communication that the researcher will use for the analysis (p. 160). A second phase

draws attention to the specific kinds of communication activities, practices, or phenomena leading to introducing specific theories of communication activities (A) or phenomena (p. 160). A third phase involves indicating how communication is patterned or situated (S) within the particular field or community based on the culturally sensitive description and interpretation of communication as perceived and indicated by natives – an emic description (p. 161). A final phase of theorizing involves evaluation (E) of the general theory and theoretic lens as applied to the particular case or cases: whether the theoretic stance is adequate or whether it needs revising, developing, or discarding (p. 162). The phases described above refer to the BASE mnemonic, and the researcher may repeat them cyclically several times before the project is completed and finalized (p. 163).

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN BELARUSIAN DISCOURSE ON PUBLIC CREATIVITY

This chapter raises the following question: *What cultural discourses about identity are active in relation to public creative practices in Belarus?* The communication practice of the main concern in this chapter is the expression of identity in the Belarusian meta-cultural commentary on public creativity. I used the transcribed interview excerpts that render the most prominent examples of identity discourse as the primary data for this chapter. The data were analyzed using the Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) analytical procedure.

I focused on terms about identity, acting, and relating in this discourse to extract and formulate the statements of participant beliefs and/or values: cultural premises and cultural propositions. These propositions and premises, when focused on the radiants of the hub of identity, serve as the substance for analyzing meta-cultural commentary and offer a perspective for explaining symbols and cultural key terms. As I am looking at the cultural key terms in the discourse, the unit of analysis is a discursive unit, not an individual.

In the research report below, I present the findings as a series of cultural premises, or meanings that have been found most active in the identity discourse. Following CuDA analytical procedure, each premise is explicated in more detail with cultural propositions that elaborate the meanings in each premise. I have reversed the CuDA procedure in this chapter and start with cultural premises, which are then explicated in more detail with

cultural propositions (CP) to focus the reader's attention on the main themes found in the identity discourse. I provide additional historical and cultural background as a structural context for the meanings presented in discourse based on the cultural premises, cultural propositions, and interview excerpts. The analysis concludes with a snapshot of the modern-day Belarusian culture and cultural identities at play based on the meta-cultural commentary examined.

More specifically, I show how local research participants communicate six cultural identities and four cultural groups through cultural discourse when they speak about public creativity in Belarus. Additionally, I show how these categories are structured as oppositional cultural codes, such as "State" vs. "People" or "Indifferent people" vs. "Talented, really creative people," and how these discursive oppositions reflect a similar dynamic found in Ruthenian/Russian culture where the continuous interplay of opposing values has been a foundation of cultural unity throughout the history

4.1 "State" vs. "people"

When Belarusians talk about Belarus, as well as about public creativity in Belarus, they produce a specific kind of discourse about who they are. In this discourse, they say things like "we have split personality" or "authorities do not take people into account." When this is said, the discourse carries a specific meaning which I make sense of by formulating cultural premises, such as the one below:

Cultural premise 1: Belarus has more than one culture

"Belarus is divided into two Belaruses," Alesia, one of my research participants, told me when I asked her about the difference between the independent and state-organized public events.

Excerpt 1.1

48. Беларусь дзеліцца на две Беларусі, там, як Вольскі спяваў – Мінск і
48a.=Belarus is divided into two Belaruses, like Volski sung – Minsk and=
49. Менск, да. Падваенне асобы зрызвае нам дах […]
49a.=Mensk, ok: "Split personality takes our "roof" away" […]

This phrase is not self-evident, and one must know the local historical context to understand what Alesia has referenced. "Minsk" and "Mensk" are Russian and Belarusian words which name the same place – the Belarusian capital. However, these words represent two different Belaruses, as Alesia mentioned – these are two different symbols with different meanings about Belarusian identity. As we understand those meanings in detail, I will eventually propose that they be understood at the level of oppositional codes that are deeply rooted in local history.

The territory of modern-day Belarus has been perceived for a long time as a land "in-between," the territory between Poland and Russia (Pershai, 2010). For Russia, this land has been seen as a "Western edge" and for Poland as an "Eastern province" (Kuzio, 2001). Belarusian territory has historically been a battleground for opposing cultures, views, and values – between Catholicism and Orthodoxy (Pershai, 2010), between Eastern and Western civilizations (Ioffe, 2008).

As a result, the idea of traditional and modern-day Belarusian culture became a very contested and uncertain concept. It is not clear both for insiders and outsiders where does Belarus start and where does it end, both temporally and spatially, which leads to the first cultural proposition (CP):

- CP1: *Culturally, "Belarus is divided into two Belaruses" (48a)*

Because of its historical location between the opposing cultural influence from the outside, Belarusian elites have adopted different values, languages, and worldviews,

while most of the local peasant population did not change to the same extent (Cherniyavskaya, 2010). This process can be traced back to the establishment of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1253-1569), following the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795), and later to the period within the Russian Empire (1795-1917) (Cherniyavskaya, 2010). As a result, local political elites became culturally "alien" for the local population, and there has been no dialogue between the elites and the rest of the population for centuries (p. 41-42). By the time the current Belarusian territory became a part of the Russian Empire, one might say there were already two different "peoples" leaving on that territory – one was local aristocracy, elites, and educated citizens, who were mostly Polonized, and the other was the peasantry with local self-identification who comprised most of the population (p. 45).

Since the land was central for the peasant way of living, anyone who did not work on the land, including the political elites, has not been appreciated (p. 49). Moreover, the skepticism toward political and cultural innovations and social change, especially when attempted by the political elites or intellectuals, has somewhat survived among the majority of the Belarusian population who have kept the local self-identification with the remnants of traditional peasant values until today (p. 50-56).

However, some of the cultural and political initiatives enjoyed bigger popularity among the Belarusian population, since the people who brought those innovations were partially from among the "peasants." Thus, after the 1830-31 uprising, multiple members of the former aristocracy, approximately 50,000 individuals, have lost their titles and technically became a part of the peasant population (p. 62). Later, the descendants from these highly educated families became famous writers, intellectuals, and civil activists

who brought cultural and social innovations with them starting from the second half of the 19th century and up to the first third of the 20th century (p. 68-77).

Later, during WWII, multiple groups from countryside formed *partisan* (guerilla) movements, and some of the former Belarusian *partisans* attained political power after the war was ended, such as Kiryla Mazuraw and Piotr Masheraw, for example (Wilson, 2011, p. 114-117). Similarly, multiple individuals migrated from the countryside to cities in the first half of the 20th century while bringing their local self-identification with them (Ioffe, 2008). Approximately 700,000 former peasants have moved to the cities after dekulakization in 1929-1932 in addition to others and became the base for the new working class, popular intelligentsia, and state bureaucracy (Cherniyavskaya, 2010, p. 76). Thus, traditional peasant and Soviet values have mixed, and this mixture has somewhat survived until today – current Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenka and his electoral base are a good example of this mixture in present-day Belarus (Ioffe, 2008; Wilson, 2011.)

The divide between the elites and the rest of the population has survived until the present day. Similarly to the divide illustrated by this historical context, the current divide is both political and cultural, which is shown based on the interview excerpt below and the two cultural propositions that follow:

Excerpt 1.2

50. […] так і ў нас адбываецца – ёсць
50a. […] same way for us – there is=
51. культура, якую стварае дзяржава, але яна нікому непатрэбная, на гэтыя
51a.=a culture created by state, but nobody needs it, nobody comes to these=
52. канцэрты, на той жа Дзень Вышыванкі, ніхто не прыходзіць, таму што гэта
52a.=concerts, like that Embroidery Day, because this all is=
53. зроблена дрэнна, калхозна, по-савецку, без, ну, улічвання нават нейкага
53a.=done bad, like kolkhoz, Soviet-style, without, like, taking into account any=
54. мінімальнага жадання і ажыдання слухачоў, наведвальнікаў, проста жыхароў
54a.=minimal desires and expectations of the listeners, attendants, simply dwellers of the=
55. горада. […] І, як бы, атрымліваецца, што мы жывем, як бы, у двух
55a.=city. […] And, that is, it appears that we live, that is, in two=
56. паралельных Беларусях. Беларусях – непрыгожае слова ((смяецца))… Э:м- ну,
56a.=parallel Belaruses. Belaruses – not a beautiful word ((laughs))… E:m- well,=
57. дзяржаўныя ствараюць штосьці сябе: і наведвальнасць, і цікаўнасць, як бы,
57a.=the state creates something for themselves and the attendance and interest, that is,=
58. людзей, вельмі маленькая, асабліва, людзей, якія рэальна таленавітыя,
58a.=among the people is very low, especially, among the people who are talented,=
59. рэальна творчыя.
59a.=really creative.

- CP2: *"We live in two parallel Belaruses" where "state [authorities] create something for themselves" (56a)*
- CP3: *"The attendance" for the state events "is very low, especially among the people who are talented, really creative" (56-58a)*

Interview excerpts 1.1 and 1.2 show how participants structure their discourse into two cultural categories of "s*tate*" and "*people*" regarding the public creative events. The informant says that the country is divided and that its population lives in "two parallel Belaruses" (54a-55a). One can see a similar pattern in the historical background provided above, where two "peoples" exist and function simultaneously and separately from one another. The informant mentions that "state [authorities] create something for themselves" and that what the "state" does is not popular among "the people," especially among those who are "talented" and "really creative" (56a-58a).

Moreover, the research participant suggests that there is a "culture created by [the] state" which "nobody needs it, nobody comes to these concerts" (49a-51a) and which is "done bad," which is "Soviet-style," "Kolkhoz" (52a), and which is created without "taking into account" the "desires" and "expectations" of the "dwellers of the city" (52a-54a). "*Soviet-style*" refers to the type of events that represent an eclectic mixture of various styles, genres, and activities at the same time while also involving the promotion of the state ideology. "*Kolkhoz*" initially meant a Soviet-era *collective farm* and has later become an idiom which refers to something disorganized, of poor quality, which does not operate well, is outdated, and is shameful to show to others. "Done bad" refers to poor organization, sound, light, equipment, program and agenda of "low interest," poor skills of the performers, even the ways of promoting the event or activity among the public, which are also poor.

The words "people," "dwellers," and "nobody" in this case are related to those who's attitudes and values, both cultural and political, differ from the values of those who live in the Belarus where "state" lives (*Belarus 1*). This means that the population of *Belarus 1* attends and participates in the events created and organized by the "state," while the population of *Belarus 2* does not. What this excerpt shows is that among those who live in the *Belarus 2* there are the people who are "talented" and "really creative" and who are not "interested" in the events organized by the "state," as well as whose "desires" and "expectations" are not "taken into account" when "state [authorities] create something for themselves."

4.2 "State" and public performance: The tractor ballet

In this section, I provide a brief example from my ethnographic observations of public creativity in Minsk, Belarus. This piece shows a snapshot of state-organized public culture, which my interlocutors address as "Soviet-style" where "state [authorities] create something for themselves," as discussed in the previous section.

It was July 3rd, 2017 – a usual annual Independence Day parade took place near the WWII Victory Park and national commemoration monument in Minsk, Belarus. A wide avenue has been newly painted with special markings for tanks, military vehicles, marching troops, and performers. I could see a massive crowd standing by both sides of the avenue and watching the parade. There was a special tribune allocated for the Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenka and other state officials. The president and those around him were dressed in military uniform decorated with edges and stripes. The president was smiling. His eyes were radiant.

A voice from the speakers announced the next performance: "And now we will see something incredible – a tractor ballet! This is a new form of industrial art…" I saw three big green and four smaller red tractors approaching: red and green are the colors of the Belarusian national flag. All tractor roofs except one were decorated with huge straw hats. Each straw hat had a traditional Belarusian red-and-white ornament at the bottom. Two of the big green tractors had a mustache attached to their bumpers, while the remaining green tractor was decorated with big lady lips attached to the bumper and had a purple cornflower wreath on its roof. Cornflower is considered as one of the Belarusian national symbols, while straw hats and cornflower wreaths are considered as traditional items associated with the Belarusian countryside and peasant population. A woman was

driving this tractor: “The only lady tractor driver at the Minsk Tractor Works,” as the voice from the speakers remarked.

Minsk Tractor Works (MTW) is one of the biggest industrial legacies of the Soviet Union, along with such enterprises as Minsk Automobile Works and Belarusian Automobile Works. The brand produced by MTW is known abroad as Belarus tractors. However, in the native language, the name is spelled Belarusian, which is the term the people of Belarus use to refer to themselves – Belarusians. This kind of naming was one of the ways of promoting and emphasizing Belarusian national identity during the Soviet times, along with the multiple WWII and guerilla (*partisan*) monuments and commemoration practices introduced during the Soviet era, which related Belarusian identity with the war events, partisans, and Soviet Union (Cherniyavskaya, 2010).

As the tractors took their positions, a piece of familiar music began to play from the speakers. It was “Jas mowed down the clover” (“*Kasiũ Yas’ Kanyushynu”*) by the popular Soviet-era Belarusian band *Pesniary*. The band was very popular in the 1960s-1970s across the Soviet Union and even toured through the U.S. South in 1976. The music played by *Pesniary* addresses the themes of Belarusian nature and the countryside through rock and folk elements. The tractors started moving and drawing figures on the asphalt as the music played. The president was smiling. A group of young women, all dressed in white pants, white t-shirts with traditional red ornament on their chests, and white caps were waving with the bouquets of white flowers above their heads while the tractors were performing the dance. The sides of the road and tribunes were decorated with the Belarusian national symbols and flags – lots of red and green flags everywhere.

The dance was over, and the tractors drove away. The crowds on both sides of the avenue escorted the machines with their eyes. No one was allowed on the road. The security and police were everywhere – the people with walkie-talkies and earpieces dressed in civilian outfits stood along both sides of the road. Big Brother was watching.

This so-called Tractor Ballet illustrates an extreme example of how 'art' can be harnessed by the state for political purposes, thus celebrating and promoting the official Belarusian "state" culture. This example shows how art and politics intertwine in this ritualized performance of the Belarusian nation-state. This form of public celebration and public assembly is officially sanctioned and promoted by the "state." However, there are categories of people, such as "talented" and "really creative" who do not attend this kind of events and do not want to be a part of this official Belarus, as discussed in the previous section.

4.3 Language matters

It was around 6:30 PM, and the sun was still up when we met with Alesia near the café. She was a young lady in her mid-20s. "Hi" (*Pryvitanne*) – she greeted me in Belarusian. "Hi" (*Privet*) – I replied in Russian. We sat down by the window in a quiet corner of the café and ordered some tea. The place consisted of two areas. One area had a few small tables and a counter where tea, coffee, cacao, and chocolate were made. The counter had a showcase with cakes, cookies, and pastry. I could see a coffeemaker on top of the counter and multiple transparent cans with tea and herbs on the shelves behind the counter. Another room was separated from the counter area by the wall. The room had an entrance with no door in the middle. This area had three black round tables with soft chairs and sofas. The walls were decorated with the images of urban nightlife showing

city buildings from other countries. We chose the second room because it was quiet and more suitable for the conversation.

While I was setting up my computer and recorder for the interview, we had a small chat. My interlocutor kept speaking Belarusian, and I kept speaking Russian. “Let’s be informal” (*Davay na ty* – meaning using “you” instead of “You”) – she said. I agreed. Then she asked me, “Are there any preferences about the language for the interview?”. “No” – I replied – “I am fine with any language you choose – we can even speak English if you would like.” We both laughed. “Ok, then I would prefer Belarusian, I feel more comfortable when using Belarusian” – she said in Belarusian. “Ok, sure,” – I replied in Russian.

The same pattern continued throughout the whole process of the interview. Alesia was telling me stories about her experience in organizing events and creative activities in Belarusian, and I was asking questions in Russian. All this felt pretty normal to me. I understand and can use both languages, but prefer Russian, because Russian is an everyday language in my family, most of my friends speak Russian, and most of the people I know speak Russian as well. However, some people in the country prefer Belarusian. There are two official languages in Belarus.

The interview was over. I left the café and looked at the signboard at the building: “8 Jakuba Kolasa str.,” it said in Belarusian. Then I looked at the blackboard by the entrance: “Tea. Coffee. Chocolate…,” it said in Russian. Then I looked up: “*Dream Café*,” it said both in English and Russian. I smiled and went away.

This short encounter and the excerpt 2.1 below speak back to the idea of two Belaruses and oppositional cultural codes which exist in Belarusian discourse about

public creativity. The oppositional codes found in discourse and discussed in the previous section referred to the cultural categories of "state" as opposed to "people." The opposition discussed in this section refers to Russian-language events as opposed to Belarusian-language events organized by independent producers, not by state authorities:

Excerpt 2.1

34. AD: А имеет ли вообще значение, на каком языке проходят мероприятия?
34a.AD: And does the language of the events matter?
35. DB: Так, канешне мае, тамушта, ну, гэта разныя аудыторыі атрымліваюцца.
35a.DB: Yes, sure, it does, because, well, these appear to be different audiences.=

The next cultural proposition is formulated based on the examples above to capture a specific dynamic in the discourse related to the use of language in modern-day Belarus:

- CP4: *The language of the event matters, because "these appear to be different audiences" (34a-35a)*

The issue of language is also a serious and historical one. The notion of "different audiences" in the excerpt 2.1 brings both cultural and political meanings with it. The status of the Belarusian language has changed several times during the history of the land, and a brief background is necessary to understand what the meanings in this discourse when Belarussians speak in this way refer to. Currently, Belarus has two official languages – Russian and Belarusian; however, their use differs. One of the informants noticed that Russian is more common as a "language of everyday interaction," but Belarusian language now "gains momentum" as a language used in "the sphere of arts and culture." However, it is not simply about the different uses of language, it is also about the enactment of different political, cultural, and social identities. Language choice is an important characteristic of one's identity in Belarus (Vasilyeva, 2019; Fabrykant, 2019).

Historically, the Belarusian language was used as an official language of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and was also used in the official state documentation (Ignatouski, 1919, p. 52-53; Miller & Dolbilov, 2006, p. 18). However, in the times of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russian Empire, the Belarusian language was mostly used by the peasantry (Cherniyavskaya, 2010, p. 81). In the 1920-s, during the process of Belarusization, it was attempted to promote the Belarusian language as a standard for everyday communication; however, by the mid-1980s, the Belarusian language became mostly a language of peasantry again (p. 81). Another attempt to make the Belarusian language a standard for everyday communication was made in 1991 when it was proclaimed as the only official language by the new political elites who came to power after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ioffe, 2008, p. 64). However, after the first presidential elections in 1994 and after the 1995 referendum initiated by the president, Aleksandr Lukashenka, the Belarusian language lost its status of the only official language (p. 64). This brief enumeration of historical transitions in language use talks back to the notion of "different audiences" from the excerpt 2.1 above, yet this is just a part of the story, and there are some additional political meanings in this discourse related to the language in Belarus.

Belarusian language, along with the alternative historical memory focused on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as with corresponding *White-Red-White* flag and *The Chase* coat of arms, have been used as one of the symbols of Belarusian national identity by the pro-Western political elites who came to power in 1991, after the Soviet Union collapsed (Wilson, 2011; Ioffe, 2007; Ioffe, 2008). The national identity fostered by these elites contradicts the current official position and the official historical memory focused

on WWII, which is reinforced by the neo-Soviet flag and coat of arms (Wilson, 2011; Goujon, 2010; Ioffe, 2007; Ioffe, 2008).

Belarusian language has been deeply associated with the oppositional political forces and especially with the Belarusian Popular Front (BNF) since the 1995 referendum; the current Belarusian president Aleksandr Lukashenka made sure that the opposition is framed negatively – as former Nazi collaborators and "fifth column" (Wilson, 2011; Ioffe, 2008). This was possible since the flag and coat of arms used by the opposition have also been used as national symbols during the times of Belarusian Popular Republic in 1918-1919 under the German occupation, and during the Nazi occupation, after the assassination of Wilhelm Kube in 1943 (Ioffe, 2008, p. 58-59). However, at the same time, Belarusian language or its mixture with Russian which is called *Trasyanka* (*a Shaker*) has been used more commonly among the rural population who favored the Lukashenka regime than among the urban population who mostly opposed current political elites based on the 2004 independent polls (p. 85). This short historical background shows how the notion of "different audiences" from excerpt 2.1 refers not simply to the different uses of language but also points to the major political issues and difficulties associated with national and cultural identity which is expressed through the different language choices in modern-day Belarus.

Related to the independently organized public creative practices, "different audiences" in discourse group around Belarusian- and Russian-language events as the following excerpt illustrates:

Excerpt 2.2

43. […] То бок, ну не ўсе тыя, хто ходзіць на Эшафот, ходзяць, там,
43a.[…] =That is, well, not all those who come to Eshafot, come to, like,=
44. на нашы імпрэзы. Вось, і не ўсе тыя, што ходзяць на нашы імпрэзы, яны
44a.=our events. Like that, and not all those who come to our events, they=
45. ходзяць на эшафот, там.
45a.=come to Eshafot, ok.

The Russian language is used in a broader array of public occasions and activities than Belarusian (Wilson, 2011, p. 123), but the two "audiences" may intersect. In this case, the interlocutor referred to the independently organized events and not to those affiliated with the "state" and *Belarus 1*. However, the discourse in the excerpt above structures the people into the members of both audiences who attend mostly Russian- or mostly Belarusian-language events. This is illustrated by the phrase "not all of those who come to Eshafot, come to our events, and not all who come to our events, come to Eshafot" (43a-45a). Eshafot (*The Gallows*) is a poetry show with the mostly Russian-speaking community formed around it. "Our events" refers, in this case, to the events organized by *Art-Siadziba* and to related Belarusian-language initiatives created by independent organizers.

The two "audiences" in this discourse are similar in the way that they do not belong to *Belarus 1*; however, these "audiences" group around different centers of gravity. Specifically, the informant has mentioned the concept of *Belarusiannes* (*Belaruskasc'*) when discussing "different audiences" in more detail. In this case, Belarusian-language driven events attract those who are interested in learning about, supporting, and maintaining the "traditional Belarusian culture" – the participants speak Belarusian, listen to Belarusian-language artists, music, and lectures, they watch Belarusian-language movies, dress in "traditional" clothes, maintain "traditional" collective and historical memories, participate in "traditional" holidays and festivals, and involve in other related practices. Vasilyeva (2019) discusses a similar issue related to

independently organized Belarusian-language courses in Belarus, where the use of Belarusian language becomes a means of enacting "traditional" Belarusian identity. Russian-language driven events may touch upon *Belarusiannes*, but mostly they are organized around business and start-up culture, education, arts, city festivals, various urban communities, subcultures, and art-hubs, galleries, and other similar venues and forms of public creativity.

Both types of events and communities in this discourse involve active "audiences" who deliberately choose to participate in various independent public creative practices. These are those "talented" and "really creative" individuals who do not attend "state" events and those who live in *Belarus 2*. Some of such communities may be bilingual, where both Russian- and Belarusian-speaking "audiences" intersect. Though the discourse previously examined suggests that these "audiences" are both active and have multiple "talented" and "really creative" individuals, they are not completely identical in this meta-cultural commentary. Both "audiences" in this discourse are mostly focused on the social practices alternative to those offered by the "state." However, for the Russian-speaking "audiences" in this discourse, *Belarusiannes* is not necessarily as important as for the Belarusian-speaking "audiences." For the latter, it is included as their inalienable part where the public use of Belarusian language is one of the focal points.

As a result, there is a significant commonality, but there is also a significant difference in discourse about these two groups. However, the excerpts examined above suggest that these two groups of population are reflected in discourse as not opposing each other because they both live in *Belarus 2* and have a lot in common – they both lean toward active ways of living and toward creating alternatives in the existing environment,

they both organize and attend public creative events and activities which are different from those offered by the "state."

4.4 The people who "burn"

In the previous sections, I have illustrated how *Belarus 1* and *Belarus 2* are reflected in the meta-cultural commentary about the public event organizers in Minsk. I have also shown how the meanings of oppositional codes that refer in discourse to "state" and "people," as well as to Russian and Belarusian language, are rooted in the common past. This section aims to show how the spread and growing popularity of public events and creative practices organized and facilitated by individuals who do not belong to *Belarus 1* is activated in the meta-cultural commentary. "These are simply the people," as I was told:

Excerpt 3.1

18. AD: А как ты думаешь, что позволяет таким площадкам, как Пешеходка, вот Эшафот, Рухавік, функционировать, в принципе?
18a. AD: And how do you think, what allows such platforms like Peshehodka, like Eshafot, Rukhavik, to function, in principle?
19. DB: Тут легкі адказ, кароткі – гэта проста людзі. […]
19a. DB: The answer here is easy, short – these are simply the people. […]

The next cultural proposition is formulated to capture the discursive dynamics from the excerpt above:

- CP5: *Public creative events and platforms come to life due to "simply the people" (18-19)*

The excerpt below further illustrates what categories of people my interlocutor referred to and how are these categories related in discourse to the proliferation of public creative events and practices in modern-day Belarus:

Excerpt 3.2

20. DB:[…] Арганізатары, якая гарят, ім баліць вось гэта, бамбіць все гэтыя
20a.DB:[…]The organizers who burn, for whom it hurts, bombs them – all these=
21. рэчы, патамушта Мінск – круты горад і Беларусь – крутая страна са сваёй
21a. =things because Minsk is a cool city and Belarus is a cool country with
22. культурай, літаратурай, музыкай, мастацтвам і мне і ўсім гэтым людзям,
22a its culture, literature, music, art and I and all these people=
23. проста хочацца гэта ўсе паказаць […]
23a =just want to show= […]
26. […] ну эта проста людзі, якім больш за ўсіх прыпякае такая=
26a.[…]=well these are all the people for whom it burns hot – all this=
27. =несправедлівасць, якая адбываецца і вось таму гэта адбываецца.
27a.=injustice that happens here, and that is why all this is happening.

The excerpts 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate a cultural logic which stands in this discourse behind "simply the people" – it is ordinary citizens, individuals who make the social change thus opposing "all this injustice that happens here" (26a-27a) and who are responsible for the proliferation of the public creative practices across the country. This is something that Victor Turner (1980) would describe as *cultural creativity* that emanates out of *social drama* by means of *ritual*. Moreover, this also goes in line with Berdyaev's (2008 [1948]) writing about the duality of Ruthenian/Russian culture, where social and cultural change resulted out of opposition between the official and unofficial forms of public life. In indigenous terms, my interlocutor describes these change-makers as the people who "burn," people for whom it "hurts," people whom it "bombs" (20a), and the people for whom it "burns hot" (26a).

Social drama, according to Turner, is a universal processual unit, "a drama of living" (Turner, 1980, p. 149). It is an agonistic process which presumes the oppositional character of social relations where there is a competition between the group members based on the opposing values and ways of living in a community (p. 149-150). *Social dramas* consist of four phases: breach, crisis, redress, and *either* reintegration *or* recognition of schism (p. 149). For *social drama* to occur, the breach must be made public; the opposition must be somehow indicated within the community, the existence

of the opposing groups, values, and ways of living must be made visible for the group members, common norms or rules must be breached to indicate the schism (p. 150). The crisis follows the breach, and the opposition and conflict become visible, sides are taken, factions are formed, the struggle is exposed (p. 150-151).

The members of the disturbed group evoke specific adjustive mechanisms to resolve the conflict (p. 150). Such mechanisms may range from informal advice to legal action, and even to the performance of the public ritual aimed to close the breach (p. 151). The final phase consists either of the reintegration of the disturbed group or the social recognition of the irreparable breach (p. 151). *Social dramas,* thus, are public continuous agonistic processes where the opposition and conflict may last for long periods until the conflict is resolved either through separation or reorganization of the community, which would allow to reintegrate and unite the group members. However, such conflicts and differences have a potentiality for cultural creativity when social relations and ways of living are being transformed through liminal moments during the redressive phase (p. 161-164).

The discursive category of the people who "burn" suggests the inclination toward active action and change. These "people" cannot simply stay aside from what is going on around them; they cannot stay aside from "all this injustice that happens here" (26a-27a), they want to change something around for themselves, they have some ideas, they are enthusiastic, they "burn" (27a). The people for whom it "hurts" refers to those who cannot tolerate the current social world anymore, who do not agree to the current social order and everyday reality, because what is happening and has been happening in the society does not satisfy them, living in the world as it exists now hurts them, "all this injustice

that happens here" hurts them and they decide to do something with the current situation because they "burn" inside.

Moreover, to these people, it hurts so much, that it even "bombs" them, it destroys them as individuals. The things have been so bad and unpleasant for them, that these people have decided to stand-up and to start doing something with what is going on. They cannot be a part of what destroys them, and they do something to stop being destroyed because they "burn." Finally, these are the people for whom it also "burns hot." The informant uses a Belarusian word "*prypyakae,*" which is an idiomatic concept. It can be explained this way: imagine that you are sitting on a fire pit. You would probably not be able to sit long because it literary burns hot. In this case, the meaning is the same – these people cannot stay inactive, because it "burns them hot" doing nothing while "all this injustice" happens. They decide to change things for themselves and initiate or facilitate various public creative initiatives, such as urban festivals, poetry communities, start-up communities, social entrepreneurship initiatives, various forms of artistic and creative performance, popular education clubs, and other forms of public collective action involving creativity.

The stimulus for doing this is negative, though. These categories of people involved in these kinds of activities to escape from "all this injustice," thus constructing a liminal space of *communitas* in Turner's (1969) terms (p. 95-97). This is creativity stimulated by unsatisfying conditions; this is a change through reinvention and recreation of the everyday lives by changing the environment to the extent when it becomes closer to the expectations that these categories of people have from the society. This is an

attempt to materialize *Belarus 2* and its culture in everyday life. This is a manifestation of *Belarus 2* and its culture on the public.

Similarly, Berdyaev (2008 [1948]) talks about the phenomenon of *vol'nitsa* which refers to physical, mental, and spiritual escape from the intolerable reality of the official state and church throughout the history of Rus' (p. 39; 182), as well as about the related concept of *sobornost'*, which reflects an eschatological component in the Ruthenian/Russian culture with its inclination toward the ideal common future where people are united based on love, understanding, and equity as opposed to the evils of the official statehood and priesthood (p. 200-204). Berdyaev (2008 [1948]) emphasizes a historical opposition between "us" – intelligentsia, society, people, a liberation movement – and "them" – state, empire, power – a sharp divide not experienced to the same extent by Western Europe (p. 182). Uspenskij & Lotman (1996) argue that duality and opposition, in general, are integral and essential parts of Ruthenian/Russian culture where social, cultural, and political transformations happen by reintroducing past into present in a reversed form – a continuous reversal of opposing values throughout the history which constitutes cultural unity (p. 339-341).

4.5 The "indifferent" people

The discourse about public creativity is cast with various cultural characters: there are people who are active and creative, and there are people who do not participate in these activities and who do not attempt any major steps toward changing their current condition due to various reasons. The next cultural proposition is formulated to focus upon these aspects of the discourse where cultural participants refer to the knowingly non-present categories of people:

- CP6: *"Indifferent people who are not worried about the development of our country and future" (16-17) and "the people who do not believe that they can find something here" (87-88) do not attend public creative events*

This cultural proposition is based on the two excerpts below, which provide additional insight into the identities of those who do not participate in the public creative action:

Excerpt 4

12. DB: […] Я думаю- блін, агульны адказ будзе – людзі, якія не цікавяцца.
12a.DB: […] I think- damn, the overall answer will be – the people, who are not interested. =
13. Якім увогуле не цікава будучыня краіны і якім нічога не цікава і э- вось,
13a.=Who, in general, are not interested in the future of the country and who are not interested in anything and e- well,=
14. там: "Мая хата з краю, я там, зарабіў сабе на кватэру-машыну, там, вось
14a.=like: "None of my business, I've, like, earned myself to buy an apartment, a car, yeah, that is,=
15. дзецям там штосьці, і как бы я паел, тэлебачанне паглядзў" – ну такія,
15a.=got something for the kids, and, that is, I had a meal, watched TV" – well, such,=
16. […] абыякавыя людзі, якіх не- іх не забоціць, не клапоціць развіццё нашай
16a.=[…]indifferent people, who are not worried about the development of our=
17. краіны і будучыня. Вось так. Напэўна такі адказ.
17a.=country and future. Like that. I guess, this is the answer.

Excerpt 5

87. AS: Люди, которые не верят в это. Люди, которые не верят в то, что они
87a.AS: The people who do not believe in this. The people who do not believe that they
88. могут здесь найти что-то.
88a.= can find something here.

Excerpt 4 mentions particular categories of people who do not attend and who are not involved in public creativity. The interlocutor talks about the people who are "not interested in anything" (13a) and who are "not interested in the future of the country" (13a), about those who are "indifferent" (16a) and are "not worried about the development of the country and future" (16a-17a). Furthermore, in excerpt 5, another interlocutor suggests that the "people who do not believe in this" and the "people who do not believe that they can find something here" do not attend and do not participate in public creativity.

They "do like all," as Alex, an independent producer and musician in his mid-20s, mentioned while setting-up his mic and speakers for the upcoming street performance.

The category of "*indifferent*" people is described as those who are focused on their personal everyday life: "None of my business, I've, like, earned myself to buy an apartment, a car, yeah, that is, got something for the kids, and, that is, I had a meal, watched TV" (14-15). The informant uses a Belarusian word *"abyyakavyya"* (16a), which refers to being indifferent and inactive regarding what is going on around if this does not personally touch upon a person. In addition to this, the informant uses the Belarusian idiom *"maya hata z krayu"* (14a), which refers to the state when an individual does not interfere with what is happening around because it does not personally and physically relate to this individual. The literal translation of this idiom is "*my house is on the side,"* meaning that this house is not a part of the community regarding this matter.

This saying can have both negative and positive connotations – one is being indifferent to the issues of others; another is being protective of others as a community. Being on the side, in this case, is both being simultaneously inside and outside of the community. This idiom suggests that one can be indifferent to their fellow men on some issues but will be protective of them in front of an alien at the same time.

This "indifference" has a cultural explanation. It refers to the local concept of *wellbeing* (*dabrabyt*). This concept and the behavior described by the research participant is directly related to the *traditional Belarusian archetype*, which is a form of local identity with particular attitudes toward the world that was shared by the Belarusian peasantry (Cherniyavskaya, 2006). According to the folklore study done by Cherniyavskaya (2006), a *traditional Belarusian* is very practical and is focused on perceptible *now* rather than

on the abstract and unknown *future*; *good* and *right* for the *traditional Belarusian* is what brings *material*, *sensible*, and *visible* result in a short period of time; public collective expression is not something that a *traditional Belarusian* would normally involve into, because they are self-sufficient and free inside (p. 18-57). In addition, the best strategy for the *traditional Belarusian* is to do *like all* and to take a fatalistic stance toward change, meaning the belief in that the situation will unfold itself in a positive way when the time is right and thus no additional active action is necessary to make the situation unfold artificially, because the *evil* will eventually destroy itself from within (Cherniyavskaya, 2006, p. 112).

Thus, when my interlocutor refers to the people who do not attend or participate in public creativity as to "indifferent" people, this points to the particular Belarusian identity that unfolds around one of the norms of *traditional* behavior that is practiced by a certain fraction of the Belarusian society. This discourse, structured as such, does not mean that these people are indifferent about the future of the country, it simply shows that they do not see how all these public creative practices resolve their current problems and living situations. For this reason, these categories of people pursue the practices directed toward *wellbeing* (*dabrabyt*). Similarly, another research participant indicates that the people who do not participate in public creativity "do not believe" that they will "find something there" or "do not believe in this," which refers to the same cultural phenomenon. These individuals, when discussed in these terms, do not see how such events may benefit their personal *wellbeing*. In addition, based on the *traditional Belarusian archetype* discussed, only what is practical, perceptible, and material is important in the immediate perspective, while the ephemeral benefits of public creativity

are not something one can immediately apply to resolve sensitive practical and material everyday issues.

The categories of people mentioned in these two sections refer to different cultural identities. They belong to different cultural groups and different Belaruses accordingly. One is publicly active and directed toward a possible "ephemeral" future. Another is privately active and directed toward the particular "material" and immediate moment.

Though there are two different approaches toward the world and toward the way of action in society, these two cultural poles are not entirely separated from one another. The next section shows how the relationship between these two cultural poles is activated in discourse.

4.6 "State," "people," and "change"

Cultural premise 2: There are slow changes that happen "in all spheres" because the people with new "thinking" come and the people with old "thinking" leave

In the previous section, I have shown that this discourse structures people into categories and that each has distinctive meanings. Moreover, the excerpts examined suggest that these discursive categories of people may have oppositional attitudes toward social and cultural change. On the one hand, there are two major categories of citizens that group around Russian-language and Belarusian-language creative practices and communication events. These citizens are publicly active, they have the people who are "talented," "really creative," who "burn," for whom it "hurts," "bombs," and "burns hot" among them. On the other hand, there are those who belong to the "state," and "create something for themselves," which is "Soviet-style," "Kolkhoz," and done "bad[ly]."

There is another category of people who are “indifferent” and “do like all.” The latter category bears the remnants of the *traditional Belarusian archetype,* which was fostered in peasant culture throughout history. As has been shown from the historical account, this category is partially mixed with the “state” culture since it became one of the bases for the state ruling elites, bureaucracy, and working class in the Soviet times Belarus. It has also been shown that this category of the population is one of the biggest supporters of the current Belarusian president, Aleksandr Lukashenka, who vastly promotes peasant values on public, while at the same time emphasizing collective Soviet-past and WWII period of the Belarusian history.

However, as the excerpt below illustrates, the “state” culture is also not a unanimous entity, and it is changing:

Excerpt 6

28. DB: Таму я лічу, што папулярнасць вялікая і яна ўзрастае, таму што ўсё
28a.DB: That is why I think that the popularity is great and it grows, because=
29. больш адыходзяць вось, ведаеш, людзі з савецкім мысленнем, яны зыходзяць
29a.=you know, the Soviet-thinking people they more and more are stepping away, they are=
30. на пенсію, там, іх здымаюць там з нейкіх пасадаў, там, і людзі больш
30a.=retiring, ok, they are being removed from some office posts, ok, and the younger=
31. маладыя, больш сучасныя, больш па-еўрапейску якія думаюць, яны прыходзяць
31a.=people, more contemporary, more European-minded, they come=
32. і ну ва ўсіх сферах, там, дзяржаўных, там, НДА, ну адбываецца, ну- вельмі
32a.=and in all spheres, like state, like NGO, well, a very slow change=
33. марудна, але, як бы- змены адбываюцца. Вось. Такім чынам.
33a.=is happening. Ok. Like this.

The last two cultural propositions are formulated to grasp how the popularity of public creative events is related in discourse to changes within the “state:”

- CP7: *The “popularity is great, and it grows” because the “Soviet-thinking people” “are stepping away” and “younger people, more contemporary,” “they come” (28a-31a)*

- CP8: *A "very slow change is happening" "in all spheres" due to the "younger people, more contemporary" (32a-33a)*

The data suggest that "the popularity" of the public creative practices "is great" and "it grows" (28a) because the "Soviet-thinking people" are "stepping away," are "being removed from the office," they are "retiring" (29a-30a), and the "younger," "more contemporary," "more European-minded" "people" "they come" (30a-31a). Since these categories of people come, "a very slow change is happening" "in all spheres" – "like state" and "like NGO" (32a-33a). Thus, the research participant suggests that the popularity of the public creative practices grows because of the deep systemic and cultural change that is happening within the "state" and within society in general. The change is triggered by the categories of people who "come." Thus, one may talk about a new "state" counterculture, which brings the values of *Belarus 2* into the heart of the *Belarus 1* – the state apparatus itself (see more on countercultures in Clarke, Hall, Jeferson & Roberts, 1975). This indicates that the divide between the elites and the rest of the population slowly narrows down, though the divide is still very pronounced.

4.7 Summary

The analysis of discourse performed in this report suggests that modern-day Belarus has multiple cultural categories of people with distinct identities. Based on the historical record provided and on the research participants' accounts, one may see how these cultural categories of people with different identities are related to each other in regard to social practices of public creativity. This analysis also shows how modern-day discourse about identities in Belarus is historically contingent and encompasses the whole range of complex social relationships that have survived for centuries. Various cultural

identities and oppositional cultural codes found in modern-day Belarusian discourse, thus, exist not only here and now, but also refer to and are scattered along the local historical timeline.

Based on the analysis, the concepts are discussed into the several categories that are grouped based on the common characteristics illustrated earlier in the text. Thus, it is suggested that modern-day Belarus has two major oppositional cultural entities: *Belarus 1* and *Belarus 2*. Each of these cultural entities consists of various cultural identities found in the existing discourses about the Belarusian culture in regard to the public creative events. The cultural entities are as follows: *"State,"* which consists of *Old-style officials* and *"More European-minded" officials*; *"People,"* which consists of *"Soviet-thinking" citizens, "Indifferent" citizens, Active Russian-speaking citizens,* and *Active Belarusian-speaking citizens.*

Old-style officials are comprised in the discourse of those who "create something for themselves," who are "Soviet-thinking," who "are stepping away," "being removed from the office," who do not take "desires" and "expectations" of "city dwellers" into "account."

"More European-minded" officials are those who "come" in place of the *Old-style officials*, who are "younger," "more contemporary," because of whom "slow change is happening in all spheres."

"Soviet-thinking" citizens are those who "are stepping away," who "are retiring," are those who participate in the events and public practices that "state [authorities] create […] for themselves."

"Indifferent" citizens are the biggest fraction of the Belarusian population, which operates based on the "traditional Belarusian archetype," which is based on the historical peasant values. These are the people who "do like all," who operate based on the concept of *wellbeing*, who are active privately, not publicly, who value *material* over *ephemeral*, and who are focused on perceptible immediate gains rather than on potential future gains. These are the people who "do not believe that they can find something here" in regard to the public creative events. This is the category of people who are usually called *Tutäyshyya* (*Locals*) by scholars and writers when speaking about their reluctance to cultural innovations (for more information on this concept, see Kupala, 1953; Ioffe 2008; Cherniyavskaya, 2010).

Active Russian-speaking citizens are those who are "talented," "really creative," those who "burn," for whom it "hurts," "bombs," "burns hot" "because of all this injustice" and due to whom "all this is happening" – meaning that the public creative platforms and events function and develop. These are the people who group around public creativity and related collective action.

Active Belarusian-speaking citizens are like the above category, with the main difference that they also group around *Belarusianness*, not just around public creativity and related collective action.

Finally, these six cultural identities may be grouped based on four distinct cultural discourses in relation to public creativity in modern-day Belarus. These cultural discourses refer to the major cultural trends that the informants have indicated in the contemporary Belarusian society. The cultural discourses are as follows: *Old-style*

culture, "State" counterculture, Active citizen culture, Alternative Belarusian-language culture.

Old-style culture is characterized by the reluctance to change and thus is comprised of *Old-style officials, "Soviet-thinking" citizens,* and "*Indifferent" citizens.*

"State" counterculture is characterized by the inclination toward change and is comprised of *"More European-minded" officials.* However, this counterculture is still a part of the "state" and thus is stuck in-between *Belarus 1* and *Belarus 2*, between "*State"* and "*People."*

Alternative Belarusian-language culture is characterized by the inclination toward change "because of all this injustice that happens here" and is also grouped around *Belarusianness,* public creativity, and related creative collective action. It is comprised of *Active Belarusian-speaking "citizens"* and partially out of *Active Russian-speaking citizens.*

Active citizen culture is characterized by the inclination toward change "because of all this injustice that happens here" and is grouped around business, public creativity, and related creative collective action, while *Belarusianness* is not the necessary case. It is comprised of *Active Russian-speaking citizens* and partially out of *Active Belarusian-speaking citizens.*

4.8 Chapter conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has provided an in-depth cultural insight into a discourse which is highly active in the modern-day Belarusian society. As a result, six distinct cultural identities have been extracted from the meta-cultural commentary provided by the informants regarding the public creative practices and events. These six

identities are as follows: *Old-style officials, "More European-minded" officials, "Soviet-thinking" citizens, "Indifferent" citizens, Active Russian-speaking citizens,* and *Active Belarusian-speaking citizens.*

The six identities extracted from the meta-cultural commentary have been combined into four groups based on the cultural discourses activated by the informants. The four cultural groups are as follows: *Old-style culture, "State" counterculture, Alternative Belarusian-language culture,* and *Active citizen culture*.

The identities and cultural groups introduced by this study provide a deeper understanding of the modern-day Belarusian society and its cultural organization as perceived in discourse by the local cultural participants. This is a significant addition to the previous scholarly literature about Belarusian identity, which has been mostly focused on top-down approaches to political and national identities, thus paying less attention to the cultural process as perceived in discourse by Belarusians themselves.

Additionally, this study points that oppositional cultural codes found in discourse about public creativity in Belarus reflect a similar dynamic found in Ruthenian/Russian culture where the continuous interplay of opposing values has been a foundation of cultural unity throughout the history. Thus, this analysis potentially adds to the understanding of major cultural trends in a region significantly larger than the current Belarusian territory – a post-Soviet cultural space. The interplay of various oppositional codes and cultural identities in the discourse examined also shows how communication may be reflective of everyday lives, making them meaningful via indigenous meta-cultural commentary, which is important for understanding cultures others than our own.

CHAPTER 5

"COMMUNICATION" AND "CREATIVITY"

In this chapter, I provide a detailed cultural discourse analysis of an actual communication event – *Creative Mornings Minsk* – to capture the situated communication that happens within the event. The main research question addressed in this chapter is *How identity is cued and made relevant in communication that unfolds within the Belarusian practices of public creativity?* The focus of this chapter and the main communication practice of concern is the ritual of public creativity. I ask the following research sub-question to address this issue: *What are the characteristics and functions of communication at the Creative Mornings Minsk?*

The primary data for this chapter were 17 videotaped sessions of *Creative Mornings Minsk,* which are uploaded on the *Creative Mornings Minsk* website and are available for public use. Each video is between approximately 25 and 45 minutes long. I have also attended several sessions in-person as a participant-observer in order to get a better understanding of the community and their communication practices from within.

In analyzing these sessions, I focused on the discursive hub of identity expressed in discourse through the radiants of acting and relating. I have selected and transcribed the most prominent examples that render cultural key terms and statements about identity, action, and relationship at this communication event to formulate a set of cultural propositions and premises which reflect the statements of participant value and/or belief about communication and identity at the *Creative Mornings Minsk.*

In the analysis below, I present the findings as a set of cultural propositions and premises based on the excerpts and cultural key terms examined. As a result of this

analysis, I show how "communication" becomes a totemizing ritual of public creativity at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community and how public creativity becomes a process of building and maintaining togetherness through time and space.

5.1 "The case is in […] *Creative Mornings*, that's it"

The analysis in this section is based on the excerpts from a single videotaped discussion and captures the situated speech from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* project. The speakers of this discussion are the initiators and organizers of the project in Belarus. They have used this discussion to summarize their experience of starting, maintaining, and developing the project for approximately 1.5 years.

Creative Mornings is a global grassroots initiative that is currently spread over 180 cities around the world. Typically, the meetings are held in early AM hours (8:30 AM in Minsk) and change locations from time to time, thus continually moving around the various venues in the city. In the case of Minsk, the meetings have been held at the following venues so far: *Ў-Gallery, Space, ЦЭХ, KORPUS, ЛАЎКА-cafe* outdoor yard, and the *National Art Museum of Belarus*. The typical audience is around 100-150 people per meeting. Each *Creative Mornings* also features various partners from the local craft- and small businesses that provide coffee, lemonade, cookies, pies, tea, and other items.

Every meeting is dedicated to a specific topic introduced by one of the cities from the global community, and the guest speakers give a presentation related to that topic recounting the audience how they have addressed this topic in their everyday professional and personal practice in the local context. Some of the topics featured at the Minsk meetings have been "Equality principles in the *Pocket Rocket*," "How Belarusian media

survive," "Curiosity and creation of educational events," "How to start everything from scratch and not to f*ck up," and other.

The speakers so far have been selected among the non-state independent professionals, artists, educators, and other people involved in a variety of activities and initiatives, such as journalist and the founder of online travel portal *34.Travel mag*, the owners of the local craft coffee business *Kitchen Coffee Roasters*, the founder of the grassroots initiative that creates and sells items branded with a variety of the "traditional" Belarusian symbols *Symbal.by* and related project that addresses the issues of "traditional" Belarusian identity *Art-Siadziba*, and others.

In analyzing these data, I am curious about the ways identity is cued and made relevant during these meetings. *Creative Mornings* is one of the many independent grassroots initiatives that currently exist in Minsk, Belarus. Such grassroots initiatives and communities that form around them have been flourishing and spreading all around the country in recent years. Such initiatives range from artistic performance and urban festivals to educational, cultural, social, and business entrepreneurship projects and conventions.

Drawing from the perspectives of Ethnography of Communication, Theory of Cultural Communication, and Cultural Discourse Theory I focus on various discursive cues that point to the ways identity is represented in this discourse and attempt to find out what are the meanings associated with this identity in relation to the activities described by the interaction participants. More specifically, I look into the discursive hub of identity and the ways it is expressed in this discourse through the semantic radians of action and relation. Based on these hubs and radiants found in the data excerpts, I formulate cultural

propositions that capture the interplay of these elements in this discourse. I do it to provide the statements of value and belief about the cultural practice from the point of view of the cultural participants. I link these propositions with the particular parts of data to provide the discursive context for their further explanation and interpretation.

Excerpt 1.

173. […] -- это глава Creative Mornings в Москве. Я говорю: «Дим, а
173a. *[…] -- this is a head of Creative Mornings in Moscow. I say: "Dim,*
174. вот, what's the point, да? А в чем смысл, вот как бы к чему, да, это всё
174a. *and so, what's the point, yeah? What is the sense, like where, yes, all this*
175. ведет? Вот какое развитие у Creative Mornings в Москве, да?» […]
175a. *leads? Like what development is there for Creative Mornings in Moscow, yes?" […]*
178. […] А:а:м- и он мне говорит: «А нету развития.
178a. *[…] A:a:m- and he tells me: "But there is no development.*
179. Дело не в том, как- куда вы движетесь, а дело в том, что один раз в
179a. *The case is not in that how- where you are moving, but the case is in that once a*
180. месяц в вашем прекрасном городе проходит один раз прекрасный Creative
180a. *month in your beautiful city there is held a beautiful Creative*
181. Mornings и всё». […]
181a. *Mornings and that's it." […]*

The first set of cultural propositions is based on the transcript above and captures the main cultural logic behind this discourse:

- *CP1: Creative Mornings is not about "development" or about "where you are moving" (175a-179a)*
- *CP 2: Creative Mornings is about simply being out there – "the case is in […] Creative Mornings, that's it" (179a-181a)*

This excerpt points to the higher importance of the mere existence of such a project as *Creative Mornings*, rather than the importance of further project development. This tendency is explicitly indicated in the transcript in the following way: "But there is no development. The case is not in that where you are moving, but the case is in that once a month in your beautiful city, there is held a beautiful Creative Mornings, and that's it" (178a-181a).

These data speak back to the discourse from the interviews that I have analyzed earlier as the following excerpt illustrates:

Excerpt 1.2 Interview with Alesia, June 2017.

50. […] так і ў нас адбываецца – ёсць
50a. […] same way for us – there is=
51. культура, якую стварае дзяржава, але яна нікому непатрэбная, на гэтыя
51a.=a culture created by state, but nobody needs it, nobody comes to these=
52. канцэрты, на той жа Дзень Вышыванкі, ніхто не прыходзіць, таму што гэта
52a.=concerts, like that Embroidery Day, because this all is=
53. зроблена дрэнна, калхозна, по-савецку, без, ну, улічвання нават нейкага
53a.=done bad, like kolkhoz, Soviet-style, without, like, taking into account any=
54. мінімальнага жадання і ажыдання слухачоў, наведвальнікаў, проста жыхароў
54a.=minimal desires and expectations of the listeners, attendants, simply dwellers of the=
55. горада. […] І, як бы, атрымліваецца, што мы жывем, як бы, у двух
55a.=city. […] And, that is, it appears that we live, that is, in two=
56. паралельных Беларусях. Беларусях – непрыгожае слова ((смяецца))… Э:м- ну,
56a.=parallel Belaruses. Belaruses – not a beautiful word ((laughs))… E:m- well,=
57. дзяржаўныя ствараюць штосьці сябе: і наведвальнасць, і цікаўнасць, як бы,
57a.=the state creates something for themselves and the attendance and interest, that is,=
58. людзей, вельмі маленькая, асабліва, людзей, якія рэальна таленавітыя,
58a.=among the people is very low, especially, among the people who are talented,=
59. рэальна творчыя.
59a.=really creative.

One of my research participants has been referring to the existence of "two parallel Belaruses" (55a-56a), where the categories of "state" and "people" oppose each other. Based on that interview account "state" public events are done "bad[ly]," they are "Kolhoz" and "Soviet-style" (51a-53a) type of events which do not suit the "talented" and "really creative" "people" (57a-59a) and where the "desires" and "expectations" of "attendants" are not "taken into account" (53a-55a). *Creative Mornings* is an independent grassroots initiative in Minsk, Belarus and it is not organized by the "state," thus providing an alternative platform for "people" to convene, especially for those "talented" and "really creative" "people" whose "desires" and "expectations" are not "taken into account" when the "state [authorities] create something for themselves" (57a). In this case, the mere existence of an alternative to the "state" is more important than the further

"movement" (179a) and "development" (178a) of the *Creative Mornings* initiative in Minsk – there is "a beautiful Creative Mornings, and that's it" (180a-181a).

5.2 "The most important thing" is "communication"

While the discussion above explains some of the logic behind this discourse, there is more to it than simply an existence of an alternative to the "state." Following the ideas explicated above, the excerpt below dives deeper into the cultural logic behind the essence of the *Creative Mornings* project in Minsk:

Excerpt 2

181. […] И, я сначала не поняла его слов. А:м:м- (.) но потом,
181a. *[…] And me, first I did not understand his words. A:m:m- (.) but then*
182. (.) наверно по прошествии где-то полгода, или даже год, за один Creative
182a. *(.) probably after around half a year has passed or a year, one Creative*
183. Mornings до нашего дня рожденья, я увидела людей, которые приходят на
183a. *Mornings prior to our birthday, I have seen the people who come to the*
184. Creative Mornings уже не в первый раз и которые ведут себя абсолютно по-
184a. *Creative Mornings already not for the first time and who behave themselves absolutely*
185. другому, нежели, чем мы собрали людей на Creative Mornings, там, в
185a. *different to how that we have assembled the people for the Creative Mornings, like, for*
186. первый раз, в Феврале, да, мы как мы вам рассказывали. […]
186a. *the first time in February, yes, as we recounted to you. […]*
189. […] но, самое главное на Creative
189a. *[…] but the most important thing at the Creative*
190. Mornings -- то, что происходит до выступления. Почему мы собираем всех в
190a. *Mornings -- is that what happens before the performance. Why do we assemble all*
191. восемь тридцать, а спикер начинает говорить в девять? Потому вот эти
191a. *at eight thirty and the speaker starts to talk at nine? Because these particular*
192. полчаса -- это тот- те моменты, которые вы можете посвятить общению друг с другом […]
192a. *half an hour - are tha- those moments which you can consecrate to communication ((obschenie)) with each other […]*

The cultural propositions below summarize the cultural logic of this excerpt in the following way:

- *CP3: "Performance" is not "the most important thing" at the Creative Mornings (189a-190a)*

- *CP4: "The most important thing" at the Creative Mornings is "communication ((obschenie))" (189a-192a)*

These cultural propositions address two main issues. First is the importance of "communication" as the essence of the *Creative Mornings*. Second is the process of the creation of a new cultural form. I will start by explaining the importance of "communication" in this particular case and then will turn to the explanation of how it is related to the creation of a new cultural form.

The speaker argues that "the most important thing at the Creative Mornings is – that what happens before the performance" (189a-190a), "because these particular half an hour – are those moments which you can consecrate to communication ((*obschenie*)) with each other" (191a-192a).

When the speaker talks about "communication," she uses the Russian word *obschenie,* which has a slightly different meaning than the English word *communication*. Scholars in different fields have already addressed this difference in meaning, but there are two academic accounts most relevant to this case. One is a chapter by Igor Klyukanov & Olga Leontovich (2017), and another is a book by Alexei Yurchak (2006).

Klyukanov & Leontovich (2017) view *obschenie* as one of the terms in the Russian language, which represents the local idea of communication with its unique cultural meanings that are used to construct a certain view of communication (p. 30). *Obschenie* is a Slavic word that derives from *obschyi,* which means 'common' (p. 30). According to scholars (Klyukanov & Leontovich, 2017), *obschenie* is typically identified with such human characteristics as participation, sharing, and sympathy (p. 31). *Obschenie* as a social practice has been traditionally more welcomed and had more

positive connotations than another, more formal and stylistically more specialized practice and a way of thinking about communication – *kommunikatciya* (p. 31). The term *obschenie* is often used to refer to an exclusive and unique character of interaction among the cultural participants (p. 32).

The practice of *obschenie* usually involves sharing something with other participants, such as time, money, food, and drink (p. 32), but this is far from a complete list of what one can share during such practice. Participants may share emotions, feelings, secrets, doubts, concerns, and other things – *obschenie* involves a broad spectrum of things that may be shared during the practice, and usually, there is more than one thing which is shared. Klyukanov & Leontovich (2017) argue that *obschenie* refers to the maintenance of community and fellowship (in time), while *kommunikatciya* refers more to the information exchange (through space) (p. 33).

However, understanding the term by itself does not say much about the particular meaning of *obschenie* in relation to *Creative Mornings.* Other studies, focused on "communication" as a cultural term, have shown that what is implied by this term may vary based on the particular cultural environments where this term refers to. Thus, a study by Katriel & Philipsen (1981) examined "communication" as a cultural term based on the ethnographic analysis of "communication" as of recurring public drama that is present on the Phil Donahue TV-program. The basic purpose of this study was to problematize the meaning of "communication" in some U.S. texts by exploring the individual meanings of it in interpersonal context (p. 301).

The main distinction found in the accounts about "communication" was a juxtaposition of the "real communication" and "small talk" (p. 303). While the first

concept refers to something deep and intimate, the second concept refers to something shallow and impersonal; "real communication" is about the interpenetration of the "personal spaces," while "small talk" is not (p. 303). "Communication" is also something that involves "self-definition" and brings the potentiality to change (p. 303-304). "Communication" can be "open" when it refers to "really talking" and "mere talk" when it refers to "normal chit-chat" (p. 306-307).

Based on the informant accounts, the authors came up with three oppositional dimensions of communication that have been derived inductively: 1) *close/distant*; 2) *supportive/neutral*; 3) *flexible/rigid* (p. 308). Additionally, "communication" was indicated by the informants to be a form of interpersonal "work," because people "work" on their "relationship" to make their "relationship work" (p. 309). In this case, "self," "relationship," and "communication" are seen as objects of individual and interpersonal "work" (p. 309).

Based on these findings, the researchers introduce their own metaphor for "communication" – the "communication" as "ritual" because there is a particular sequence of how one becomes involved in "real communication" (p. 310-311). The researchers outline the basic ingredients of the "communication" ritual using Hymes's categories of topic, purpose, participants, act sequence, setting, and norm of interaction to describe the ritualistic sequence of "sit down and talk," "work out problems," and "discuss our relationship" which is *intelligible to* many Americans (p. 311-316).

Another study focused on local meanings of "communication" as a cultural practice investigates the use of the term *kommunikacio* by Hungarian citizens when they evaluate political communication (Boromisza-Habashi, 2016). As a result, Boromisza-

Habashi (2016) shows that *communication* in Hungarian discourse has a pure and a corrupted form and that every assessment of *communication* points toward a presumed ideal form of communication (p. 4612).

Thus, when Hungarians evaluate political communication, it is presumed that there is an ideal, undistorted version of *communication* that presumes the coexistence of equally informed citizens and political elites and that there is a distorted and coerced version of *communication* which is viewed as a political disease (Boromisza-Habashi, 2016, p. 4612). In addition, the ideal form of *communication* in this Hungarian political context suggests that it should be truthful, ethical, and artful because it is good for society as it creates a sense of common reality that the citizens and political elites share among themselves, as well as fosters unity among the citizens and politicians as opposed to divisions caused by the distorted and corrupt form of *communication* (p. 4612).

Thus, in the Hungarian discourse about political communication, it is suggested that *communication* matters, because it shapes and becomes the way of expressing the political relations in societies and thus right ways of *communicating* can bridge the gaps between the political elites and citizens and open a possibility to better existing sociopolitical relations, while wrong ways of *communicating* hurt the relationships among the citizens and political elites in society (p. 4612).

These two studies have shown that local meanings about communication have to be considered since they give additional insight into the ways *communication* is perceived, evaluated, and practiced in different cultural contexts. Thus, I will now try to embed the ideas about *communication* into the context of modern-day Belarusian public creative practices. Alexei Yurchak's (2005) account on the practice of *obschenie* in the

Soviet Union might be constructive in explaining what the speaker means when talking about the *obschenie* at *Creative Mornings* in the excerpts above.

Yurchak (2005) talks about the proliferation of non-institutionalized milieus of people who had shared interests in "hanging-out" and interacting within such milieus in the 1960s and 1970s in the Soviet cities (p. 141). Such milieus of people have been called using a slang word *tusovki* and have been characterized as living outside of the official authoritative discourse or *vnye* the official Soviet sociality (p. 141). According to Yurchak (2005), the period of the Khrushchev's liberating reforms in the early 1960s has been characterized by a "cultural transformation that was a minute in quantitative terms but enormous in cultural significance" (p. 141). This transformation happened in many large Soviet cities and is sometimes referred to as "the Great Coffee Revolution," as many of these *tusovki* happened at the newly created modest cafes in city centers that sold strong coffee and pastry (p. 141). Such cafes enabled new spatial and temporal contexts where large groups of Soviet youth were able to interact and convene to practice living *vnye* the official state sociality (p. 141).

According to Yurchak (2005), all these milieus were not static spaces but were rather continuously reproduced through the practice of *obschenie* (p. 148). Yurchak (2005) argues that the term *obschenie* cannot be adequately translated into the English language and refers both to "communication" and "conversation," while also including non-verbal interaction and spending time together (p. 148). It is different from simply *hanging-out* as practiced in the U.S., "because it always involves an intense and intimate commonality and intersubjectivity," thus it is not merely an amount of time spent in the

company of others (p. 148). The practice of *obschenie* in regard to that Soviet period is best characterized by this quote from Yurchak (2005):

> The noun *obschenie* has the same root as *obschii* (common) and *obschina* (commune), stressing in the process of interaction not the exchange between individuals but the communal space where everyone's personhood was dialogized to produce a common intersubjective sociality. *Obschenie*, therefore, is both a process and a sociality that emerges in that process, and both an exchange of ideas and information as well as a space of affect and togetherness (p. 148).

Yurchak (2005) argues that *obschenie* may also include complete strangers and that this cultural practice among the various *tusovki* became widely spread in the Soviet Union of that time (p. 148-149). This practice of *obschenie* allowed to reshape and transform the existing order of things, thus producing the worlds that existed *vnye* the Soviet regime and which introduced different spatiality, temporality, thematic, and meaningfulness into the social life (p. 150). *Obschenie* resulted in a new form of sociality and personhood that went beyond the personal and the social, and where togetherness was a central value in itself (p. 151). This statement reminds Turner's (1974) idea of *communitas* in a sense that it characterizes the relationship beyond the mere comradery between those who are undergoing ritual transition together and where participants' identities are liberated from the conformity to general norms (p. 274).

This links back to the first two cultural propositions, which argue that the case is not in the development but in the *Creative Mornings* itself, "and that's it" (181a). This also links back to the concluding words of Excerpt 2 and to the second set of cultural propositions, which argue that it is *obschenie* rather than presentations given by guest speakers, which is "the most important thing at the Creative Mornings" (189a-190a). Similarly to the Soviet period of 1960s described by Yurchak (2005), the current period in Belarus is also ripe with various *tusovki*, with a variety of alternative social spaces,

various forms of public creative practices that lead to emergence of new social and cultural forms and the emergence and maintenance of the new forms of personhood. *Creative Mornings* is one of such spaces.

5.3 "*Obschenie,*" ritual, and transformation

The practice of *obschenie* transforms the ways "people" relate to each other, and the ways "people" behave in public spaces. The speaker mentions that "probably after around half a year has passed or a year […] I have seen the people who come to Creative Mornings already not for the first time and who behave themselves absolutely different to how that we have assembled the people for the Creative Mornings […] for the first time" (182a-186a). This statement points to the general tendency of transforming what has been there before. It points to the cultural dynamism that is facilitated by *obschenie* in this setting, to the process of cultural creativity described by Philipsen (1987; 2002), to the transformation that results from the "self-immolation of order as presently constituted" in Turner's (1980) terms (p. 161-164), and to the overall ritualistic nature of this activity.

Furthermore, it is not simply about the change in behavior. It is also about the process of emergence of new sociality which is alternative to the "state" and which is created, shared, and maintained through the practice of *obschenie* by the participants who share "particular interests" (215a-216a) and "similar views" (216a) as the excerpt 3 illustrates:

Excerpt 3.

196. […] вот эти самые, ценные, тридцать минут. Ну вы ж сами понимаете, что,
196a. *[…] these exact precious thirty minutes. But you understand yourselves, right, that*
197. возможно, из-за белорусского менталитета, или из-за того, что это просто
197a. *probably because of the Belarusian mentality or because of that this is simply*
198. новый формат, мн:н- у нас есть слайд: «Не сиди, знакомься», который мы
198a. *a new format, mn:n- we have a slide: "Don't seat, do meet," which we*
199. каждый раз включаем на эти первые тридцать минут и очень часто а- мы
199a. *every time turn-on for these first thirty minutes and very frequently*
200. видим, шт- ну штук двадцать людей, которые сидят и смотрят на этот слайд
200a. *a- we see th- well about twenty people who seat and look at this slide*
209. […] И вот только потом, через, скоко там, девять-
209a. *[…] And that is only then, after, how much, like, nine-ten*
210. десять месяцев, я словила себя в этом моменте, когда люди вот в эти
210a. *months I caught myself in this moment when the people that is in these*
211. первые полчаса, они просто общались, они приходили на Creative Mornings,
211a. *first half an hour, they simply communicated ((obschalis')), they were coming to Creative Mornings,*
212. они видели друг друга, обнимались, обменивались новостями, просто
212a. *they saw each other, hugged, exchanged the news, simply*
213. болтали ни о чём и я поняла, что: «Вот оно, наконец-то» -- у людей
213a. *chatted about nothing and I understood that: "This is it, finally" – the people*
214. сформировалась привычка. Просто привычка, что один раз в месяц у вас
214a. *have formed a habit. Simply a habit that once a month you*
215. есть вот это вот место, куда вы можете прийти, увидеть людей с похожими
215a. *have this particular place where you can come, see the people with similar*
216. интересами, похожими взглядами и пообщаться с ними […]
216a. *interests, similar views, and to communicate ((poobscaht'sya)) with them […]*

The following cultural propositions summarize the cultural logic found in this discourse about *Creative Mornings:*

- *CP5: At the beginning, "the people" did not participate in "communication ((obschenie))" (196a-200a)*
- *CP6: "Only then," "after nine-ten months," "the people" began to participate in "communication ((obschenie))" – "they simply communicated ((obschalis'))" (210a-211a)*
- *CP7: "The people" at the Creative Mornings "have formed a habit" of "communication ((obschenie))" – "they saw each other, hugged, exchanged the news, simply chatted about nothing" (212a-214a)*

- *CP8: This is now a shared knowledge that "once a month you have this particular place" – Creative Mornings, "where you can come, see the people with particular interests, similar views, and to communicate ((poobschat'sya)) with them […]" (214a-216a)*

The speaker describes how the change in behavior happens as a result of practicing *obschenie* at the *Creative Mornings*. She starts with giving an example of what kind of behavior was observed at the beginning of the project "[…] probably because of the Belarusian mentality or because of that this is simply a new format, […] very frequently we see […] about twenty people who seat and look at this slide" (197a-200a). The speaker has mentioned the slide "Don't sit, do meet" (198a), which the organizers "every time turn-on for these first thirty minutes" (198a-199a).

Further in the discourse, contrasting with these initial observations, the speaker says that: "And that is only then, after […] nine-ten months I caught myself in this moment when the people […] in these first half an hour, they simply communicated ((*obschalis'*))" (209a-211a). Here, the speaker indicates that after a period of "nine-ten months," the participants of *Creative Mornings* have learned a new way of behavior and being – they have "simply *obschalis',*" meaning that they have been performing and enacting the practice of *obschenie* at this *tusovka.* Thus, *Creative Mornings* becomes both a place where one can learn a new practice that has been introduced and where one can actually practice it, thus performing cultural enactment, which, according to Philipsen (1987), leads to the affirmation of shared identity (p. 250).

There are three generic cultural forms mentioned by Philipsen (1987), which lead to the affirmation of shared identity – *myth, ritual,* and *social drama* (p. 250). Among the

three forms mentioned, *ritual* seems to fit the most to explain the cultural practice that unfolds at the *Creative Mornings*. Philipsen (1987) defines *ritual* as "communication form in which there is structured sequence of symbolic acts, the correct performance of which constitutes homage to a secret object" (p. 250). Rituals are also about group inclusion as they signify some dimension of collective context and mobilize the feelings of inclusion, security, and trust (Turner, 1988, p. 161). In this case, *obschenie* is both the process and the result of this ritual at the *Creative Mornings*, because it transcends the here-and-now moment of interaction and leads to the emergence of something bigger than the mere collective co-presence. Togetherness here becomes more than just a sum of its participants – this is a creation and enactment of synergetic aggregate.

There have been multiple studies done that focus on various communication rituals that have proven that certain communication practices become central for building and maintaining a form of connectedness and unity among people if performed correctly while also disrupting this unity and connectedness if performed improperly. Thus, a study by Katriel (1985) talks about Israeli practice of *griping* (a form of plaintive talk), which is wide-spread among the Israeli middle-class society and is performed not as much for the sake of complaining about problems, but rather to ventilate, to express and reinforce social and national unity, and to reconfirm group identities.

Similarly, Sotirova (2017) shows how the communication practice of *oplakvane* ("complaining") becomes a way to reinforce social relationships and group identities by celebrating common fate in Bulgaria. A study by Winchatz (2017) illustrates how German communication practice of *jammern* ("whining") has similar functions to Israeli *griping* and Bulgarian *oplakvane,* with the difference that *jammern* as opposed to *griping* is

focused on one's own personal problems, not the common social issues, and may also harm interpersonal relationships.

Another study by Katriel (2004) showed how the ways of relating in Israeli community have changed through time and how cultural practices directed toward building and maintaining this communal unity and dialogue in the Israeli society have also changed from the early pioneers' ritual of confessional *soul talk* to more direct *dugri* speech that gained popularity among the Sabra culture. One more study on communication rituals and relating by Nuciforo (2017) talks about Russian cultural practice of "sitting," which involves a very close intimate form of communication practiced in Russian culture that frequently happens while consuming alcohol together and also helps to build and maintain interpersonal and group relationships when performed correctly.

In general, rituals involve *liminality (a threshold)* or *passage* from one state, from one cosmic or social world to another (van Gennep, 1960, p. 10; Turner, 1980, p. 160). Ritual activity or *rites of passage* has three phases: *preliminal* (rites of separation), *liminal* (rites of transition), and *postliminal* (rites of incorporation), while each of these phases is not necessarily present or elaborated in different contexts to the same extent (van Gennep, 1960, p. 11; Turner, 1980, p. 163). Van Gennep (1960) argues that these phases permeate the life of society, where individuals are continuously separated and reunited, where social forms and conditions are changed and transformed, where there are always new thresholds to cross, and where the *ritual patterns* or the *patterns of the rites of passage* continuously recur beyond the multiplicity of forms (p. 189-191).

Furthermore, according to Philipsen (2002), communication is both *heuristic* and *performative* resource for performing the cultural function (p. 59). Since *Creative Mornings* introduces a communicative practice that allows both learning and performing the learned knowledge about *obschenie*, it may be treated as a communal conversation where particular shared identities are created, maintained, learned, and enacted. According to Carbaugh (2007), communication both presumes and constitutes social realities (p. 168). Thus, the cultural practice of *obschenie* in the context of *Creative Mornings* should also be seen as presuming and constituting particular social realities. In this case, the realities that are alternative to the "state," the realities that allow living *vnye* when the identities of "talented" and "really creative" "people" "with particular interests" and "similar views" are created, maintained, learned, and enacted through the participation in this communal conversation.

The speaker suggests that after "nine-ten months […] the people […] simply communicated ((*obschalis'*)), they were coming to Creative Mornings, they saw each other, hugged, exchanged the news, simply chatted about nothing […] – the people have formed a habit" (209a-214a). This statement suggests that the participants have learned how to participate and how to maintain the communal conversation that unfolds at this cultural scene. They have demonstrated this knowledge and meaningful participation by being present at the scene, and by knowing the ways of being present – they "saw" each other, thus recognizing the mutual presence and recognizing each other as the fellow participants in this communal conversation. Moreover, the knowledge of how to be meaningfully present at this cultural scene was demonstrated by "hugging," "exchanging the news," and "simply chatting about nothing" – by reproducing similar routine from

one *Creative Mornings* to another: "That is it, finally – the people have formed a habit" (213a-214a).

Social processes depend on "habits" or behavioral routines, where the participants repeatedly involve in similar practices and maintain them among the time and space without a significant mental and interpersonal effort (Turner, 1988, p. 162). Routines allow for the continuous reproduction of personhood and social institutions (Giddens, 1984, p. 60). Routinized practices are predictable and thus grant the participants a sense of ontological security (p. 64). By creating routinized practices, people order their lives and interactions, which brings the community members together at predictable times and places (Turner, 1988, p. 164). Forming a "habit" in the context of *Creative Mornings Minsk* means that this new cultural form is now routinely practiced by those who know how to meaningfully participate in this kind of events, it means that since a new cultural form has become a "habit," it may now be seen as an established public practice where an alternative form of collective sociality is repeatedly manifested.

Obschenie here may be seen as a so-called *totemizing ritual* which reaffirms the group involvement and makes the group and its activities the focus of attention, where the relationship among the group members and the group itself become the objects of homage and "worship" (Turner, 1988, p. 162). It is now common knowledge and "simply a habit that once a month you have this particular place where you can come, see the people with similar interests, similar views, and to communicate ((*poobschat'sya*)) with them […]" (214a-216a), where the term *poobschat'sya* indicates the active form of the noun *obschenie*, presuming that *obschenie* shall take place when one is meaningfully present at *Creative Mornings.*

Thus, the following cultural premise summarizes all the above observations from the discourse examined: *Creative Mornings is a place where there is "communication."*

Based on the analysis performed in this section, I will now focus on some additional meanings about "communication" as described in this discourse and then will summarize and list the main elements of the totemizing ritual of *obschenie* discussed here.

5.4 "An international morning sect"

In this section, I further explicate the participant meanings about Creative Mornings and the forms of "communication" that are found here based on the data from other sessions of this community. The excerpt below introduces the indigenous meanings associated with the Creative Mornings activity as perceived in this situated discourse.

1.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from April 2017 (00:52-3:30)

1. ML: […] я вам в самом начале расскажу, что такое Creative Mornings.=
1a.ML: […] I will begin with telling you what Creative Mornings is.
2. =Creative Mornings это, на самом деле, международное движение- я бы даже=
2a.=Creative Mornings is, actually, an international movement- I would even=
3. =так сказала, международная утренняя секта. Она проходит в ста шестидесяти=
3a.=say that way, an international morning sect. It is held in hundred sixty=
4. =плюс городах мира:э- постоянно увеличивается количество этих городов […]
4a.=plus cities of the world:e- the amount of these cities constantly grows[…]

- *CP1: "Creative Mornings" is not simply a local community in Minsk, it is, "actually, an international movement," "even an international morning sect" (1.1: 2a-3a)*

The participant refers to Creative Mornings as to "an international morning sect" (1.1: 3a), which is something that goes in line with Berdyaev's (2008 [1948]) writing about the duality of Ruthenian/Russian culture. Berdyaev wrote about the historical role of sects as alternatives to the official church and priesthood, where there was the same oppressiveness as within the state (p. 39). The sects and heresies had an element of truth in them as opposed to the untruth of the official churchiness (p. 40). Thus, a sect, in its

general essence, and when referred to in the case of the Creative Mornings, bears in it an idea of an alternative to the official routine and social life.

Creating alternatives to the official life has been noted in the local cultural space throughout history and involves the ideas of *vol'nitsa*, which means a physical and/or spiritual escape from the state (p. 182) and *sobornost*' which reflects an eschatological perspective in local culture – the idea of a collective striving to the ideal future world where everyone will live in peace, love, and harmony as opposed to the falsehood and oppressiveness of the official state and church (p 200-204). To achieve the state of *sobornost'*, the communion of people who share similar ideals must be reached (p. 202). *Sobornost'* presumes the form of *obschenie,* which allows for 'real' unity of "people," a form of collective solidarity that cannot be achieved via any official decree or order but is rather achieved based on the organic compound of freedom and love (p. 202-204). It means that *sobornost'* happens not as a result of mere following the existing official norms, but as an outcome of 'real' unity, 'real' *obschenie.*

The excerpts 1.2 and 1.3 below and the cultural propositions that follow add more to the ideas of *vol'nitsa, sobornost',* and *obschenie* based on the discourse collected from the Creative Mornings Minsk:

1.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from April 2017 (00:52-3:30)

5. =[…] Creative Mornings это в первую очередь проект для творческих людей,=
5a.=[…] Creative Mornings is primarily a project for the creative ((tvorcheskih)) people,=
6. =но, если вы читали- там у нас есть два манифеста, которые развешаны а- по=
6a.=but if you read- we have two manifests out there which are hung a- in=
7. =этому залу- это международные манифесты и:э- первая строчка в этом тексте=
7a.=this hall- these are international manifests and:e- the first line there=
8. =гласит, что каждый человек, на самом деле, творческий. Поэтому, считайте,=
8a.=says that each person is actually creative ((tvorcheskiy)). Thus, think=
9. =что этот проект открыт для всех.
9a.=that this project is open for all.

- *CP2: "Creative Mornings" is "primarily" for those who are "creative" ((tvorcheskie)), but since everyone is "creative" ((tvorcheskie)), Creative Mornings "is open for all" (1.2.: 5a-9a)*

As the cultural proposition above suggests, "Creative Mornings is, primarily, a project for the creative people" (5a), which means for "each person" (8a) who wants to become a part of it and of the *obschenie* that happens there. However, this is just a part of what is being suggested here. The speaker continues further, and the next excerpt offers two more cultural propositions which explicate this discourse in more detail:

1.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from April 2017 (00:52-3:30)

10. […]=началось это всё, зародилось, конечно, в Нью-Йорке. Вот- а:а:м- вчера=
10a.[…]=it all started, of course, in New-York. That is- a:a:m- yesterday=
11. =Лиза из Нью-Йорка, из штаб-квартиры Creative Mornings, передавала всем=
11a.=Liza from New-York, from the Creative Mornings headquarters, said to all=
12. =привет, передавала всем «Good morning», а:а:а- и:и- почему мы начали=
12a.=hello, said to all "Good morning," a:a:a- a:and- why did we start=
13: =Creative Mornings в Минске? А:а нам кажется, что в Минске тоже очень много=
13a.=Creative Mornings in Minsk? A:a- we believe that in Minsk there are also lots of=
14. =а:м:м:м- интересных, необычных, м- я избегаю слова творческих,=
14a.=a:m:m:m- interesting, unusual, m- I avoid the word creative,=
15.=нестандартных, прогрессивных, эм:м- открытых, м:м:м- Европейски мыслящих=
15a.=non-standard, progressive, em:m- open, m:m:m- European-thinking=
16.=людей и:и:и- именно а:а:а- для того, чтобы мы все больше общались,=
16a.=people a:a:and- exactly for that so that we all communicate [obschalis'] more=
17. =знакомились друг с другом, а- мы делаем Creative Mornings. […]
17a.=get acquainted with each other, a- we do Creative Mornings. […]

- *CP3: "Creative ((tvorcheskie)) people" are those who are "interesting," "unusual," "non-standard," "progressive," "open," "European-thinking" (1.3.: 14a-15a)*
- *CP4: Creative Mornings is a place where "creative ((tvorcheskie)) people" can "get acquainted with each other" and to "communicate ((obschalis')) more" (1.3.: 14a-17a)*

The cultural propositions above suggest that *Creative Mornings* is done to facilitate *obschenie* and unity among the "people" with similar ideals – among the

"creative people" (5a), who are "interesting" (14a), "unusual" (14a), "non-standard" (15a), "progressive" (15a), "open" (15a), "European-thinking" (15a). It is a platform where "creative people" (9a) can "get acquainted with each other" (17a) and to "communicate more" (17a), and since "each person is actually creative" (8a), "all" (9a) can and are welcome to participate in facilitating *obschenie* and unity among the "people" at the Creative Mornings.

There is also one more discursive cue that says something about the identity of people who convene at the Creative Mornings. The speaker uses English instead of Russian or Belarusian when she says: "Good morning" (12a). Different language choices in interactions have been shown to serve as the means for enacting and communicating different identities (Gumperz, 1982; 2015). For example, a study by Bailey (2001) shows how Dominican Americans switch between Spanish and English to activate different facets of their identities in interactions. Another study by Bailey and Lie (2013) shows how Chinese Indonesians in Java use Western first names and surnames containing Chinese elements as both a form of resistance to assimilation policies and for creating boundaries between the ethnic Chinese and Indonesians. Additionally, a study by Anzaldua (2012) talks about the area of the U.S. and Mexico borderlands where using a hybrid language becomes one of the elements in maintaining a *mestiza* consciousness, thus enacting an identity which is neither Mexican, neither US-American.

In this case of Creative Mornings, using English in the scene where English is not necessary is a way of enacting a particular identity which allows bringing "New-York" (11a), as well as Europe, the U.S., and other parts of the 'Western' world closer to the participants in this discourse. The use of English language in interactions in Belarus, and

in this case, in particular, signifies something, it says something about a person who is using it. In this case, the use of English words and concepts instead of Russian or Belarusian equivalents signifies closeness to Europe/West. It signals that the person is not from the "state" or "traditional" culture, but that a person is "more contemporary," more "European-minded," and "creative," same as "all" at the Creative Mornings.

5.5 *'Tvorchestvo' vs. 'creativity'*

The previous analyses and the excerpts provided have multiple instances that refer to "creativity" in one form or another. Thus, a more detailed explanation of this cultural term is necessary to provide additional insight into the indigenous meanings that stand behind this concept.

The word *'creativity'* is literary translated into Russian and Belarusian languages as *'tvorchestvo'* or *'tvorchasc"* accordingly. However, there is another word with a Latin root in both languages, which also means *'creativity,'* and this is the word *'kreativnost''* or *'krэatyũnasc'.'* I will use the Russian versions of the word in the explanation below, which, I guess, may also be seen as saying something about the type of my Belarusian identity.

While in English, the word *'creativity'* can be equally applied to any type of creative activity, in Belarusian, same as Russian, there are different connotations for the words *'tvorchestvo'* and *'creativnost'.'* In the colloquial everyday use, the former and its linguistic derivatives are more frequently used to describe various forms of artistic expression *(tvorchestvo* (a creation)*)*, a trait of personality (*tvorcheskiy chelovek* (creative person)), an unconventional approach to a problem *(tvorcheskiy podhod* (creative approach)*)*, and so on. The latter and its linguistic derivatives may also mean those things,

but in many cases, it is more closely related to business and is used to describe nonstandard solutions in marketing, advertising, show-business, design, and other related areas *(kreativnoe reshenie* (a creative solution)*)*. It is also used to describe nonstandard forms of behavior that lead to positive results or impress others, not a mere idiosyncrasy *(kreativnyi podhod* (creative approach)*)*.

The basic philosophical distinction between the two terms is that *'kreativnost''* refers to the individual *ability* to nonstandard solutions, while '*tvorchestvo*' refers to the *process itself*, which reflects the actual *immersion into the activity* that leads to the emergence of new material and spiritual, or non-material, values which also have social importance (Urazova, 2017, p. 654). '*Kreativnost"* also refers to the *ability* to create new products and forms which fit into the surrounding context and environment, while '*tvorchestvo*' presumes active involvement in the creation of these new products and forms (Zhuravlev & Nestik, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, the product of *'tvorchestvo'* would be *'tvorenie'* (a creation) or *'tvar''* (a creature), while the product of *'creativity'* would be *'kreativ'* (a creative solution), which suggests the latter to be more instrumental than the former.

Additionally, the word *'tvorchestvo'* in its everyday colloquial use may have a more positive and neutral connotation in a sense that it is considered as more 'spiritual,' 'philosophical,' related to the 'soul,' to the 'inner' self of a person who is involved into creative activity. It is something that may be treated as more 'sacred' in Durkheim's (1995) terms. Moreover, Berdyaev (1916) in his writing on creativity, argues that '*tvorchestvo"* is inseparable from freedom, it is a quality of those who are free, and only those who are free can involve in *'tvorchestvo'* (p. 138), which also suggests a degree of

'sacredness' of this activity as it is closely linked here with the idea of freedom. It is also interesting how this talks back to the idea of 'inner freedom' from the archetype of the 'traditional' Belarusian described earlier in relation to the discursive category of "indifferent people," which might suggest that '*tvorchestvo*' is not something that is necessarily expressed as a product in a material and/or visible form. As Berdyaev (2018) argues: "*tvorchestvo* […] is not as much about embodiment into a material form but is rather a revelation of an infinite, a flight into infinity" (p. 286).

The word '*kreativnost'*' on the other hand, is more about the 'outside' of a person as it is frequently applied to the approaches to a problem or the forms of behavior. However, it may also acknowledge the 'inner' qualities of a person, which explain why they were able to bring nonstandard results or alternative forms to life. Even though it acknowledges the 'inner' component, this word has a connotation of something more 'material' or less 'sacred' in a sense. If connecting these two terms to the ideas of *obschenie* and *kommunikacija*, then *tvorchestvo* is more likely to be an attribute of the former while *kreativnost'* of the latter. The idea of the duality of local culture thus persists and is reflected in this subtle relationship between these cultural terms found in discourse.

The word '*kreativnost'*' has also been very much overused since the 1990s, which in certain situations gives it a negative connotation, a connotation of 'hype,' or 'showing off' *(e.g., pustoy kreativ* (empty creativity) or *kreativ radi kreativa* (creativity for the sake of creativity)*).* The word may also have a negative connotation with a portion of sarcasm and may be used to ridicule certain practices, people, and behaviors to show that they are not 'sincere,' of 'poor quality,' or are done just for the sake of '*kreativ.'* This all, however, does not end the distinction in meanings between the two words. '*Kreativnost'*' may also

be used to refer to something more 'progressive,' 'modern,' 'innovative' in terms of outcomes, and/or solutions. The same can be true with the word *'tvorchestvo,'* but this does not happen as frequently as with the word '*kreativnost''.'* As mentioned earlier, using English or foreign-sounding words in certain situations also communicate 'closeness' to the "progressive" world. The world *'tvorchestvo'* has a Slavic root as opposed to the Latin root of '*kreativnost','* which sounds more English, and as a result, is more likely to be heard as something more "progressive."

That is why, in the case of Creative Mornings Minsk, the speaker says: "I avoid saying the word creative ((tvorcheskih))" (1.3.: 14a)" and uses other words to describe creative people as "non-standard," "progressive," "open," "European-thinking" (1.3.: 15a). There are at least two problems with explicitly using the word "tvorcheskih," which is being implied in this statement through these alternative terms. One is that the idea of 'creativity' is already present in the name of the community: *Creative Mornings Minsk.* Another problem is that the word *'tvorchestvo,'* when used in the context of 'kreativnost',' may attain negative connotations of something 'insincere,' 'overused,' 'profane,' and similar meanings.

For this reason, the speaker has to use alternative words that still imply *'tvorchestvo'* and emphasize the more 'sacred,' 'spiritual,' 'philosophical' connotation of the word 'creativity' in the local context. It is also important to mention that in all the instances except one, which I have in the excerpts presented in this analysis when the word 'creative' or 'creativity' is used explicitly, it is used in the form of *'tvorchestvo,'* not as '*kreativnost','* which suggests that the word '*kreativnost''* may be deliberately avoided in this context.

5.6 A growing community of practice

The following excerpt and the two cultural propositions that follow, talk about the dynamism at the Creative Mornings Minsk and provide some evidence of growth in this community during the last two years of its existence, which suggests that the practices of *obschenie* and *tvorchestvo* are not merely present here, but are also expanding.

1.4. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

18. AB: […] Ровно два года назад мы начали Creative Mornings в Минске. Вау!=
18a.AB: […] Exactly two years ago we have started Creative Mornings in Minsk. Wow!=
19. =(2.0) Мы не делали специальных подсчетов, но кажется, что за два года у=
19a.=(2.0) We did not do specific calculations, but it seems that in these two years=
20. =нас было две тысячи пятьсот регистраций, у нас более тысячи людей в=
20a.=we had two thousand five hundred registrations, we have more than a thousand people in=
21. =нашем комьюнити, по-моему, даже больше тысячи двухста. Это люди,=
21a.=our community, I think, even more than one thousand and two hundred. =These are the people,=
22. =которые за нами следят, с которыми мы знакомы и которые удивляют нас=
22a.=who follow us, whom we know, and who surprise us=
23. =каждый месяц, это наши спикеры, это наши прекрасные партнёры, но, что=
23a.=every month, these are our speakers, our beautiful partners, but, what=
24. =еще важнее – это вы (1.0) именно вы создаёте Creative Mornings,=
24a.=is more important – this is you (1.0) exactly you who create Creative Mornings,=
25. =[…] это всё вы – вы создаёте Creative Mornings и без вас, скорее всего,=
25a.=[…] this is you – you create Creative Mornings and without you most likely=
26. =мы бы уже давно закончили.=
26a.=we would already have ended long ago.=

- *CP5: Creative Mornings Minsk community is growing and has "more than one thousand two hundred people who follow" them, "whom" they "know," and "who surprise" them "every month" (1.4.: 21a-23a)*
- *CP6: These "people" are "speakers," "beautiful partners," and "what is more important," the audience members "who create Creative Mornings" (1.4.: 23a-24a)*

This excerpt illustrates that the community has been growing – "two thousand five hundred registrations" "in […] two years" (1.4.: 19a-20a) and "more than a

thousand," "even more than one thousand and two hundred" "people" in "our community" (1.4.: 20a-21a). The speaker suggests that "our community" (1.4.: 21a) is comprised out of "the people who follow us" (1.4.: 21a-22a), "the people," "whom we know" (1.4.: 22a), and "the people" "who surprise us every month" (1.4.: 22a-23a). Then he breaks it down even more: "These are our speakers" (1.4.: 23a), "our beautiful partners" (1.4.: 23a), "but what is more important – this is you" (1.4.: 23a-24a). By "you" the speaker suggests the audience, the people who come to the Creative Mornings, listen to speakers, meet each other, and maintain the community working – "this is […] exactly you who create Creative Mornings […] and without you most likely we would already have ended long ago" (1.4.: 24a-26a).

The following excerpt and the cultural proposition that follows provide more evidence of the dynamism at the Creative Mornings Minsk:

1.5. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

27. =Поэтому, давайте поаплодируем друг другу уау! (2.0). Оказывается еще,
27a.=Thus, let's applause each other wow! (2.0). It appears that
28. =утром можно быть живыми – класс. Но, поднимите руки, кто у нас в первый=
28a.=it is possible to be alive in the morning – cool. Well, raise your hands who is with us for the first=
29. =раз? Класс, мы сегодня разделились на две части. Класс.
29a.=time? Cool, we have divided into two parts today. Cool.

- *CP7: Creative Mornings Minsk is growing even further, because "today" the participants "have divided into two parts," among which one part are those who are here "for the first time" (1.5.: 28a-39a)*

This excerpt suggests that there is even more dynamic in this community – these are not all the same people who come to *Creative Mornings* – there are new participants who join the community every month. In this case, the speaker acknowledges that among those present at the event, some have never been at the *Creative Mornings* before: "Well,

raise your hands who is with us for the first time? Cool, we have divided into two parts today. Cool" (1.5.: 28a-29a).

The exact reason for this dynamic is not clear, but some of the explanations may be that: different speakers attract different audiences, speakers bring their friends, different community partners bring their friends, new people join, some people skip sessions, and other related factors. I list this not to explain why the community grows or diminishes. I do this to show that there is a flow, a dynamic. Among those who are exposed to the *Creative Mornings* and to the activities that happen there, there are many more people than those who come to a single event. As the speaker suggested, there are "people who follow us" (1.4.: 21a-22a), which means that they not necessarily must be physically present there to be still counted as a part of the community and to be able to participate in the community. Thus, the *Creative Mornings* community exists beyond the physical setting and beyond the scene where the meetings happen each month.

Thus, it follows another cultural premise which summarizes the ideas from the cultural discourse above: *Creative Mornings Minsk is an expanding practice of public 'creativity.'*

5.7 "Communication" as a ritual of public *'creativity'*

In the text below, I outline the basic features of the "communication" ritual discussed in the previous sections. I use Hymes's (1962; 1972) components from the SPEAKING mnemonic to describe the general essence of this ritual and its process. It does not mean that the ritual is repeated every time in the same exact form, but it shows the main key elements which make this "communication" ritual recognizable for participants and observers. I use the following categories from Hymes's model: scene,

setting, participants, ends (both goals and outcomes), act sequence, key, instruments, norms, and genre.

Setting:

This activity requires a platform to convene, a recurring meeting point where the exact physical architecture and environment do not have particular importance. The space for such convention may be physical or virtual (non-physical) space where the participants can meet and do things together. The main condition for the setting, thus, is that one has to be able to do things together with other people in this space.

Scene:

There are several important qualities that the scene must possess in order to be conducive for "communication." A few qualities have been named in the text previously, such as "independent," non-institutionalized, "grassroots" – in other words, the requirement is that the participants do and organize everything themselves and for themselves. The activity, in this case, is not officially sanctioned and/or organized by the "state" or someone else. This space is defined by a bigger degree of freedom, enthusiasm, attention to each other's and other participants' needs, desires, and expectations. It is not "Kolhoz," not "Soviet-style," not centralized and censured, but is a rather informal event with likeminded individuals around. These are the main characteristics of the scene for the participants of *obschenie*.

Participants:

From the analysis above, it becomes clear that there are also some requirements toward those who involve and participate in "communication." I have mentioned several participant qualities previously, such as "creative," "talented people," "the people who

burn," "liberal," "European-minded." In other words, these should be: 1) open-minded individuals who deliberately chose to participate in this communal conversation; 2) the people who strive to some commonly shared future ideal and who are willing to find and build the forms of "communication" they collectively lack; 3) the people who strive to reach a particular form of social and cultural unity.

It does not mean that it has to be a big collective event necessarily. It can be *obschenie* among a small group of friends who deliberately chose to "communicate" with each other, who do this because they follow a similar path and strive to reach a similar future ideal. Thus, they involve in *obschenie* to create and maintain collective social unity among themselves through time and space.

Moreover, the participants of *obschenie* not necessarily need to know each other. The main point is that they need to know that there are people with "similar views" and "interests" around them because *obschenie*, in its general sense, is "open for all" who are willing to participate in it.

Key:

"Communication" is rather informal in its nature with a degree of bigger closeness and openness among the participants. There are no severe restrictions, the participants "see each other," acknowledge the presence and existence of each other, share both physically and emotionally. "Communication" is inclusive, more profound than a simple small talk, and possesses the qualities of truthfulness, security, and trust.

Instruments:

Any communication channels and means can be used for *obschenie* as long as they allow to maintain steady, deep, and close connection among the participants.

Norms:

Obschenie is informal, but it has fundamental norms that must be considered by the participants. In order to meaningfully participate in *obschenie* and to let others participate in it, the participants must acknowledge the people around and "see" them, share things with them, do things together, "hug," "exchange the news," "simply talk about nothing," be open, trust others.

Genre:

It is an informal meeting with no severe restrictions and limitations on the range of possible activities that may both facilitate "communication" and/or be of secondary importance to "communication."

Ends:

The primary goal is to "communicate," to celebrate the here-and-now moment. Moreover, the possibility to meet and "communicate," the mere existence of the common space is more important than the development of this space and/or project where "communication" happens. The existence of the community is more important than the growth of the project. Relationships between people are essential, which means there are restrictions from the participants, the public, the audience, that are placed on the development of a particular project, endeavor, activity. In order to preserve *obschenie*, the project or activity cannot focus primarily on growth and revenue, but has to put "people" first – otherwise, there will be no "communication."

"Performance" or the proposed agenda is not the most important thing, while "communication" is the most important thing. Participants involve and come to "communicate" in the first place, not to consume or aloofly do things passively – they are

active participants, not merely passive consumers of leisure and/or entertainment, or passive doers of proposed activities

The outcome of this involvement becomes a creation of new routines and cultural forms – the habits of "communication," which is a continuous recurring process. A new open and shared reality is created where the common space of "communication" fosters unity and binds people together. Thus, a new form of sociality is created through the practices of *obschenie.*

Moreover, shared identity and/or new forms of personhood are created and maintained through the practice of *obschenie.* Only like-minded people who have "learned a habit" of "seeing" and acknowledging each other are able to participate in *obschenie* properly. Otherwise, *obschenie* will not happen. *Obschenie* unites, while the absence of *obschenie* divides and separates people – the creation of unity is the essence of this "communication" ritual.

Acts:

People must lack "communication" and actively seek it. There is an initial conflict involved where one lacks proper forms of "communication" and/or spaces where "communication" happens. The absence of *obschenie* makes one seek and/or initiate/create *obschenie.* This search may both happen knowingly and/or not knowingly.

Before *obschenie* starts, people have to learn that those around them are like-minded and have similar views and interests. Additionally, the participants must learn that there are no restrictions on acknowledging each other's presence and on interacting with each other freely. Moreover, one must learn that the content of the event or activity

is of less importance than "communication," togetherness, and co-presence among its participants.

The people must "form a habit" of "communication" – to learn how to "see" each other and acknowledge each other. Moreover, people must keep participating in the communal conversation. Recurring participation is required to maintain the practice of *obschenie* through time. If this sequence is accomplished, then *obschenie* is not simply achieved, but also maintained and preserved, which means it becomes routinely available for everyone willing to participate in it – it opens the possibility of joining this communal conversation by creating a space (not necessarily physical) for it and maintaining this conversation through time.

Obschenie happens here-and-now, but is always directed into the future, toward an ideal state where all participants are able to "see," acknowledge each other, and equally and freely participate in the communal conversation, in a collective communion of people where there are no divisions and restrictions for those who take part in it, where peace, love, and harmony persist. This is an eschatological existential component of *obschenie*. This is an ideal form, which is never achieved but is rather strived for.

In the beginning exists the absence of "communication," in the end, exists the presence of "communication." However, since these two are ideal absolute forms, two ideal opposites, they are never accomplished completely, only to some extent. Thus, there is no complete absence, as well as there is no complete presence – there is always a degree in the existence of both oppositions, a continuum, a process of creation and change, a process of evolution of social and cultural lives, their transformation, maintenance, and

accomplishment. *Obschenie,* thus, is a continuous process of public creativity, a process of mutual and collective *tvorchestvo.*

To summarize the above, I argue that the act sequence of *obschenie* occurs in five stages, which can cycle back upon itself at any point:

The first stage is *orienting to obschenie.* During this stage, people have a lack of *obschenie* and start looking for it, which may happen deliberately or not. When looking for *obschenie,* they search for those who have “similar views” and “similar interests.” Thus, people might attend various events or engage in various social activities because they are looking for “communication.”

The second stage is *finding similarity.* When people attend various events or engage in various activities in places where they find themselves in the same space with others, they do not involve in *obschenie* unless they know that others have "similar views" and “similar interests.” Thus, the lack of knowledge that the participants at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* have things in common was one of the main reasons why the participants were sitting instead of interacting with each other when the slide "Don’t sit, do meet!" was on the screen.

The third stage is *doing obschenie.* When the participants learn that others around them have "similar views" and “similar interests,” they now can involve in *obschenie.* As the example from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* shows, during this stage, the people stop sitting and start talking and interacting with others, they are “hugging,” “exchanging the news,” and “simply chatting about nothing.” The participants now recognize those around them as being similar and valuable to each other.

The fourth stage is to *validate relations.* When the participants recognize each other as valuable, the 'real' "communication" starts and happens. The 'real' "communication," in this case, presumes that their interactions are repeated through time, not only happen here-and-now and then end. People are looking forward to future interactions with those who have "similar views" and "similar interests." In the case of *Creative Mornings Minsk,* the desire to continue *obschenie* may be considered as one of the major reasons the participants keep coming and returning to the monthly meetings.

The fifth stage is to *create anew*. When the interactions among the people who have "similar views" and "similar interests" are repeated through time, the participants can involve in doing things together. This stage precedes the creation of something new as a result of *obschenie*. The speakers from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* referred to this stage when saying that "this is […] exactly you who create Creative Mornings […] and without you most likely we would already have ended long ago." As I will show later in the text, this is the stage which results in the emergence of alternative everyday routines introduced by "the people who burn" and to the emergence of the hybrid spaces where the "people" and the "state" interact and cooperate.

It is essential to mention that this sequence is both linear and cyclical. Thus, each stage can cycle back to the beginning of the sequence or the previous stage and can cycle back to itself. This ritual is a continuous process of seeking *obschenie,* finding similarity to oneself in others, "communicating" with those similar to oneself, validating the existing interpersonal and group relations and maintaining them through time, and involving in the collective creative activity as a result of this "communication."

5.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter shows how "communication" at the Creative Mornings Minsk becomes a *totemizing ritual* of *obschenie* in which togetherness is celebrated and is not just a form of mere co-presence, but rather a way of collective being and acting. Whereas, public creativity is not merely a form which is ostensible for an outside observer but is also a process of building and maintaining this togetherness through time and space.

"Communication," thus, becomes something of the primary importance, a value in itself through which collective unity is achieved. The lack of "communication" leads to divides, while practicing "communication" binds people together. This is a dynamic process that strives to a collective ideal future by overcoming the existing divides. Since an ideal cannot be reached, "communication" becomes an essential part of the indefinite process of creation, transformation, and change.

Based on the discourse examined, *Creative Mornings Minsk* is thus not simply a cultural product and a form of cultural consumption by urbanites, but it is rather a collective process of creation of a new cultural form where collective identity is communicated and shared among the participants, which leads to the growth and evolution of the community and the introduction of new collective routines into everyday lives. It is an expanding process of public *tvorchestvo,* not merely a product of *kreativnost'.* It is not about mere material but is also about a more profound philosophical and existential component of collective public life.

CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC CREATIVITY AND THE MYTH OF CULTURAL CHANGE

While the previous sections focused on the cultural terms of *obschenie* and *tvorchestvo* in this discourse to show the underlying philosophical and existential ideas of the practices of public creativity at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*, this section will focus on the collective stories and underlying myths which are present in discourse and are practiced in this community.

I look at how the participants of *Creative Mornings Minsk* refer in discourse to their personal and collective deeds and challenges as members of this community and how they portray themselves in relation to the community, to the challenges encountered, and to the members of surrounding social and cultural environment. I aim to provide a detailed cultural discourse analysis of the underlying collective stories that give meaning to the existence of this community and its members and that render a particular social and cultural world shared and practiced by the participants of the community.

The main research question addressed in this chapter is *How identity is cued and made relevant in communication that unfolds within the Belarusian practices of public creativity?* The focus of this chapter and the main communication practice of concern is storytelling in which the myth of cultural change is expressed in discourse at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I ask the following sub-question to address this issue: *What is the collective story the members of the Creative Mornings Minsk tell about themselves and the world they live in?*

The primary data for this chapter were 17 sessions of *Creative Mornings Minsk* recorded on video between February 2017 and February 2019. Videos represent all sessions that happened during that period and are publicly available at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* website. Each video is between approximately 25 and 45 minutes long. I have also attended several sessions in-person as a participant-observer in order to get a better understanding of the community and their communication practices from within.

I focus on the discursive hubs of identity expressed through the radiants of acting and relating found in the stories told at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I have selected and transcribed the most prominent examples that render cultural key terms and statements about identity, action, and relation in these stories to formulate a set of cultural propositions and premises which reflect the statements of participant value and/or belief about the community, its members, and activities.

In the analysis below, I present the findings as a set of cultural propositions and premises based on the excerpts and cultural key terms examined. As a result of this analysis, I show how the members of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* communicate, create, and maintain collective identities via the stories they tell at the community sessions. I start with the first discursive excerpt and a few cultural propositions to introduce the story, then follow-up with the related literature on myth to embed the story into the appropriate conceptual environment, after that I provide more examples of the story parts via discursive excerpts and cultural propositions and premises. In the end, I combine the parts of the story based on the excerpts, cultural propositions, and premises provided in this analysis to give a summary of the cultural myth examined in this chapter.

6.1 Belarus is "really worthy"

The next excerpt and the three cultural propositions that follow address some of the mythic components reflected in communication at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*.

2.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from April 2017 (00:52-3:30)

1. […]=А:а- и нам кажется, что Минск действительно достоин быть в числе таких=
1a.[…]=A:a- and we believe that Minsk is really worthy to be among such=
2. =городов, как Нью-Йорк, Берлин, Копенгаген а:м:м:м- а- Торонто и остальные.=
2a.=cities as New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen a:m:m:m:m- a- Toronto and others.=
3. =Мы ничем не хуже, может быть даже лучше, и:э:э- я уверена, что мы когда-=
3a.=We are no worse, maybe even better, and:e:e- I am sure that someday=
4. =-нибудь не мы будем- то есть не нам будут давать лекции и мастер-классы=
4a.=it is not we- that is not to us they will be giving lectures and master-classes,=
5. =э:э- международные эксперты из Лондона, или Нью-Йорка, а мы будем давать=
5a.=international experts from London or New-York, but we will be giving=
6. =мастер-классы для вот этих ребят, которые в очень таких а- м- так скажем=
6a.=master-classes for those folks who are in very such a- m- so to say=
7. =хороших условиях, по сравнению с нашими, делают свои продукты, проекты […]
7a.=good conditions, as compared to ours, making their products, projects […]

- *CP1: Minsk, and Belarus in general, are "no worse, maybe even better" than such places as "New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and others" (2.1.: 2a-3a)*
- *CP2: One day, we will be the ones "giving lectures and master-classes" to "those folks" "from London or New-York" (2.1.: 4a-6a)*
- *CP3: We are "really worthy," because we are able to "make our products" and "projects" in not "very good conditions" "as opposed to those folks" from "London" or "New-York" (2.1.: 1a; 5a-7a)*

The speaker suggested that "Minsk is really worthy to be among such cities as New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and others" (2.1.: 1a-2a) and continues suggesting that "we are no worse, maybe even better, and I am sure that someday […] it is not to us, […] but we will be giving lectures and master-classes for those folks who are in very such […] good conditions, as compared to ours, making their products, projects" (2.1.: 3a-7a). What this excerpt underlies is a specific cultural myth which is highly active

in discourse in the contemporary Belarusian speech community, as well as in some other post-Soviet countries, – an assumption that local culture and life, in general, are inferior to that of Western Europe, the USA, and other 'developed' and "progressive" countries.

A myth can be defined as a story about something significant, which may refer to what happens in the past, present, and/or future (Segal, 2015, p. 3-4). It is not simply a story about something significant, but it also accomplishes something significant for those who adhere to the myth (p. 5) – it is a reality lived (Malinowski, 1991, p. 81). The story does not necessarily have to be true, but to qualify as a myth, this story must be firmly embedded into the everyday lives of its adherents (Segal, 2015, p. 5).

Myth is not merely a story, but it is also a type of speech, a system of communication (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 217). It is a mode of signification expressed in a discursive form (p. 217). Discursive form, in this case, refers to any type of symbolic representation and communication in a broad sense (p. 218). Every myth consists of bundles of relations found in the discourse which are expressed in forms of oppositions that are resolved in the story in one way or another (Levi-Strauss, 1963, p. 211-212; 226). Myth assumes speaking *excessively* about reality, as there is always value and/or quality added to the form when we communicate something about an object (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 274). Speech is not thus just a medium of and for communication, it also shapes and constitutes social life by uniting people into a particular humanity manifested in particular words and practices – it serves both as an act of and as a resource for "membering" in the community (Philipsen, 1992, p. 13-14).

Myth does not stand by itself but is rather tied to an activity or ritual – it is an action, rather than a statement (Segal, 2015, p. 49). Rituals are meant to give form to

human life on a deep existential and ontological level, not on a mere surface (Campbell, 1972, p. 44). Rituals are physical enactments of myths, where myths give meaning to this physical form in which rituals are expressed (p. 45). A basic characteristic of myth is to transform meaning into form (Barthes, 2012 [1972], p. 242).

Myth fulfills an important function of justifying existing social practices and cultural forms and serves as a pragmatic charter for the community (Malinowski, 1991, p. 82). It also expresses and confirms traditions and existing group values (Oakley, 1976, p. 156). The purpose of a living mythological symbol is to induce community members to a certain way of acting or being within a group or society at large (Campbell, 1978, p. 88). A living mythological symbol is thus "an energy-evoking and -directing sign" (Campbell, 1978, p. 213). By participating in the community's rituals and by adhering to the myths underlying these rituals, an individual learns how to be a competent member of the community and gets an idea of how the community is organized (Campbell, 1978, p. 45-46).

Public myths where common terms and tropes about the community are found and which are available widely to the members of the community, resonate with the existential condition of hearers (Philipsen, 1992, p. 87). They provide the materials for rationalizing and interpreting everyday stories that community members tell each other in small groups or which are used by individuals to make sense of everyday reality they live in (p. 87). A myth expressed in the form of a public or personal story reveals a code – a snippet of culture in everyday communication (p. 87-88).

By studying community myths, one may not simply get an idea about the meanings, motives, and storylines that inform certain practices but also understand how

these elements converge in the everyday cultural life of the community, thus making it meaningful to its members (p. 87-88). Moreover, the key elements of a cultural code are made particularly salient in certain stories – the *cultural myths* (Philipsen, 1992, p. 133). A cultural myth thus is a kind of story that provides the community members with resources for interpreting their individual experiences and for communicating personal stories to others in commonly intelligible ways (p. 133).

Thus, on the one hand, there is this commonly shared idea that Europe/US/West is more "progressive" than Belarus, which implies that being like West is to be "progressive," "creative," and 'superior' in various kinds of ways. However, on the other hand, the discourse from the *Creative Mornings Minsk* emphasizes that this community is not in the West, it is here, in Belarus, and by suggesting that "we are" the "people" who do "progressive" things here, which are "no worse, maybe even better" (2.1.: 3a) than "those folks" (2.1.: 6a) who "develop their products and projects in such good conditions" (2.1.: 6a-7a), the speaker offers an alternative cultural myth.

This cultural myth presents the members of the local community as both in line with and in opposition to the "progressive" world. The main logic of the opposition in this story can be summarized in the following way: "we" overcome the difficulties to achieve this state, while "those folks" get it all for granted. "We" here struggle to achieve that, while "those folks" do not. That is why "we" are "really worthy," and that is why in future, "we will be giving lectures and master-classes to those folks" (2.1.: 5a-6a). On the one hand, there is this opposition between "us" Belarusians and "those folks" from "London," "Berlin," "New-York," "Copenhagen," "Toronto," and "others." The

opposition between “our conditions” and “their conditions,” while, on the other hand, “our products” and “projects” are “no worse, maybe even better” (2.1.: 3a) than “theirs.”

This is a story of collective struggle which happens in the present moment and which is directed toward a particular future ideal where the members of the community will eventually find themselves in a different state because they are “really worthy.” This talks back to Berdyaev’s (2008 [1948]) idea that Ruthenian/Russian culture, in general, has this eschatological component in it, which makes it directed toward the collective future ideal in a broader sense.

The similar mythic pattern is not only present at one of the meetings, but the story recurs in time and is found in discourse at other Creative Mornings Minsk meetings as well. The two excerpts below and the cultural propositions that follow, explicate the mythic patterns further and illustrate how this myth is being repeated and addressed by the participants throughout the year.

2.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from October 2017 (0:23-1:53)

8. AB: […] Итак, я на самом деле вернулся- в последний раз, в Августе, меня=
8a.AB: […] So, I have actually came back- last time, in August,=
9. =не было, я было, потому, что я был на Creative Mornings London […]=
9a =I was absent, I was, because I was at the Creative Mornings London […]=
10. =[…] Dammit, это было круто, это было ровно то же самое, поэтому можете=
10a.=[…] Dammit, this was cool, this was exactly all the same, thus don't=
11. =ни разу не грустить и не страдать то, что вы находитесь сейчас в=
11a.=need to be sad and don't need to suffer even once that you are now in=
12. =Минске. По-моему, это даже прекрасно, на самом деле- и, блин, это ровно=
12a.=Minsk. I think, this is even great, actually- and, damn, this is exactly=
13. =такая же опыт- такой же опыт, как и во всём мире, поэтому, радуйтесь,=
13a.=the samea experience- the same experience as in the rest of the world, thus, rejoice=
14. =поэтому, наслаждайтесь, поэтому, я предлагаю начать этот день так,=
14a.=thus, enjoy, thus, I suggest starting this day in such a way,=
15. =чтобы еще больше, чем месяц он вас заряжал.[…] Creative Mornings нужны,=
15a.=that even for more than a month it would charge you. […] Creative Mornings are needed,=
16. =в первую очередь, для того, чтобы заряжать комьюнити на месяц и далее=
16a.=in first place, for charging the community for a month and further=
17. =вперед и блин, по-мойму, это очень круто, потому, что, когда не было=
17a.=in advance, and, damn, I think that this is cool, because when there=
18. =Creative Mornings, вам нужно было самим что-то находить, а так, блин,=
18a.=was no Creative Mornings, you had to find something yourselves, and now, damn,=
19. =мы вам стучимся в сториз каждый месяц и говорим: «Чуваки, придите к=
19a.=we knock on you in stories every month and say: "Dudes, come to=
20. =нам». A:a- итак, это всё […]
20a.=us." A:a- so, that's all […]

2.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from January 2018 (2:37-3:50)

21. =ML: […] так сложилось, что это движение очень быстро разрослось и:и-=
21a.=ML: […] it so happened that this movement has spread very fast a:and-=
22. =a:a:м- Creative Mornings проводится уже на протяжении шести лет и:и-=
22a.=a:a:m- Creative Mornings have been held during six years already a:and-=
23. =эта волна докатилась и до Минска и:и- я вам хочу сказать то, что а- в=
23a.=this wave has also reached Minsk a:and- I want to tell you that a- in=
24. =Минске очень много талантливых а-, прогрессивных а-, людей а- людей,=
24a.=Minsk there are many talented a-, progressive a-, people a- people,=
25. =занимающимися творческими профессиями и не только- и:и- эм- наш город,=
25a.=occupied with creative professions and not only- a:and- em- our city=
26. =он абсолютно достоин того, чтобы стоять а:а- на том же уровне, что и=
26a.=it is absolutely worthy to stand a:a- at the same level as=
27. =Лондон, Копенгаген, Нью-Йорк и так далее, whadever. А- мы были в Апреле=
28a.=London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on, whadever. A- we were in April=
29. =на Creative Mornings в Лондоне и я вас уверяю, там то же самое, что и у=
29a.=at the Creative Mornings in London and I assure you there it is the same as=
30. =нас, вот. Поэтому, а- а- нам очень радостно то, что а- как-то, точка на=
30a.=we have, okay. Thus, a- a- we are very glad that that a- somehow, a point on the=
31. =карте а:э- напротив нашего города (0.3) ↑есть и:и- каждый месяц мы=
31a.=map a:e- in front of our city (0.3) ↑is there a:and- every month we=
32. =доказываем, что в Минске тоже есть талантливые и прогрессивные люди.
32a.=prove that in Minsk there are also talented and progressive people.

- *CP4: Creative Mornings Minsk offers "exactly the same experience as in the rest of the world" (2.2.: 12a-13a)*
- *CP5: When you participate in our "community," you become "charged for a month and further in advance" (2.2.: 15a-17a)*
- *CP6: You do not "have to find something yourselves" anymore, because "we knock on you in stories every month" and call to "come to us" (2.2.: 18a-20a)*
- *CP7: Minsk is "absolutely worthy" to be "at the same level" as "London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on," because we have "many talented, progressive people" (2.3.: 24a-28a)*
- *CP8: Minsk is now "on the map" of Creative Mornings which "proves" "every month" that we "also" have "talented and progressive people" (2.3.: 30a-32a)*

The mythic story is repeated and developed further in October 2017 (six months after the excerpt 2.1.) and in January 2018 (three months after the excerpt 2.2.), which renders the idea of being alike the "progressive" world: "This was exactly all the same" (2.2.: 10a; 2.3.: 28a-29a) as in "London" (2.2.: 9a; 2.3.: 29a) – an attempt to show that Belarus is not worse than the rest of the world and is a part of the "progressive" world community – this is what *Creative Mornings Minsk* represent in this discourse. This shows how the same idea persists over time at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* project – the mythology survives, and the story continues. The story is told and re-told. The members of this community maintain the idea through time. Malinowski (1991) argues that myth comes into play when a certain practice or moral rule needs to be justified for the group

members (p. 86), which the speakers have repeatedly been doing, as shown by the excerpts above.

This is important, because, as mentioned previously, there is a problem of downgrading local culture, local cultural practices, and their products. Thus, saying that something is like in the "progressive" countries allows fostering a different attitude through identifying with the things which are perceived as 'superior' and 'good' compared to what is done in Belarus – this is a demythization of Belarus for Belarusians, especially for "active," "really creative," and "European-minded" Belarusians. The speakers with their presentations about the "progressive" business, social, and creative projects undertaken in Belarus become a part of this demythization, because they illustrate particular examples of active projects that were initiated and developed in Belarus by Belarusians, and which are successful and important for the local communities, which are "no worse, maybe even better" than "those folks" in the "progressive" world do.

Moreover, it is suggested that *Creative Mornings* "is needed, in the first place, for charging the community for a month and further in advance" (2.2.: 15a-17a). In this case, "to charge" means "charging" based on the idea that this is not simply a local community, but that this community provides "same experience as in the rest of the world" (2.2.: 13a). This means "charging" for "a month and further in advance" (2.2.: 16a-17a) knowing that by participating in this community a person partakes in the global "experience" (2.2.: 13a), "as in the rest of the world" (2.2.: 13a).

Creative Mornings is an international project held in approximately 180 cities of the world. However, in each country and each city it is held, it may have different

meanings and can signify different things. Even though each city from the global community addresses the same monthly topic during the meetings, these topics are approached based on the local context, based on local examples, where local speakers give presentations addressing the topic based on their personal and professional experience. Moreover, it has been shown that *Creative Mornings Minsk* is not simply about the presentations, but is rather about the practice of *obschenie,* which has been rendered as being an important element of this community, as well as an essential element of public creativity.

In the Belarusian context *Creative Mornings*, thus, creates a particular meaning: it symbolizes "progressiveness," embeddedness into the global context among all the "progressive" countries in the EU, the USA, and the West. Thus, the myth activated here suggests that *Creative Mornings* in Belarus means not simply a celebration of creativity, of *obschenie,* or other things, but also superiority of Belarusian culture and its creations, the equality of things created here with the rest of the civilized world as opposed to the backwardness of the "state," commonplace, regular things done in Belarus. It is a celebration of irregularity, of uniqueness, of something that stands out among the regular order of things.

Thus, *Creative Mornings* in Belarus become a symbol of superiority as opposed to the official creativity, routine, state of things. It signifies innovation of a positive kind, as opposed to the innovations introduced by the "state" or "authorities." Innovation by itself may exist separately from the *Creative Mornings*, but in this case, it becomes a part of this community and their particular public creativity, which allows this innovation to appear in a particular physical form. Moreover, this form, which is maintained by its

community becomes a symbol of an alternative reality, where innovation is real and where the things are "no worse, maybe even better" than in "London" and "the rest of the world," as opposed in this discourse to the rest of post-Soviet Belarus, which is "Kolkhoz," "done bad," "Soviet-style," and so on.

6.2 "We wake up early" and "believe in Minsk"

However, maintaining such an innovative community requires engaging in particular recurring practices, or routines, which is reflected in the excerpt and the cultural proposition below:

3.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

1. AB: […] Я вам расскажу немного о Creative Mornings. Во-первых, будьте готовы=
1a.AB: […]I will tell you a bit about Creative Mornings. Firstly, be ready=
2. =к тому, что это утренняя секта, вы с нами навсегда x:x-. Мы просыпаемся в=
2a.=that this is a morning sect, you are with us forever h:h-. We wake up=
3. =восемь тридцать утра. Точнее, нет, просыпаемся еще раньше – приходим сюда=
3a.=at eight thirty AM. Actually, no, we wake up even earlier – we come here=
4. =в восемь тридцать утра и понимаем то, что черт возьми, люди могут быть=
4a.=at eight thirty AM and understand that, damn it, people can be=
5. =выспавшимися в восемь тридцать утра. Мы слушаем прекрасных людей, которые=
5a.=well-slept at eight thirty AM. We listen to wonderful people, who=
6. =приходят к нам поговорить про удивительные интересные вещи с удивительной=
6a.=come to us to talk about amazing things from a surprising=
7. =и очень интересной стороны. Мы видим партнёров, которые верят в Минск, не=
7a.=and very interesting side. We see the partners who believe in Minsk, not=
8. =то, что делают многие минчане ((смешок из аудитории)). Поэтому, вы с нами,=
8a.=like many other Minskers do ((audience laugher)). That is why you are with=
9. =добро пожаловать ((аплодисменты)).=
9a.=us, welcome ((applause)).=

- *CP9: "You" are with "us," because in contrast to "many Minskers," you "believe in Minsk," same as "our partners" do (3.1.: 7a-9a)*

The speaker suggests that since it is "a morning sect" (3.1.: 2a), there is no way out of here, because "you are with us forever" (3.1.: 2a). Then he describes what the common routines practiced by this community, by this "morning sect," are: "We wake up at eight-thirty AM" (3.1.: 3a), "actually, no, we wake up even earlier" (3.1.: 3a), "we come here at eight-thirty AM" (3.1.: 3a-4a), "we listen to wonderful people who come to

us to talk about amazing things from a surprising and very interesting side" (3.1.: 5a-7a), "we see the partners who believe in Minsk, not like many other Minskers do" (3.1.: 7a-8a). The latter phrase is followed by laughter from the audience – this is a common problem – the lack of belief in Minsk and Belarus in general among the "people."

Basso (1979), in his analysis of jokes among the Western Apache, has shown that jokes may not simply be told or performed to make the audience laugh, but can also refer to the existing social relations, problems, and inequalities in the society and may thus reinforce the group identity of those who perform the jokes as opposed to those who become the targets of these jokes. This not merely reminds the participants about the existing lack of belief in Minsk and Belarus in general, it also puts them into the symbolic opposition to those who lack this belief, because, as the speaker says: "That is why you are with us" (3.1.: 9a) – because "you" "believe in Minsk" (3.1.: 7a) too. This suggests that the "people" who come to *Creative Mornings* are those who "believe in Minsk," and who "believe" in Belarus in general, as opposed to those who do not participate in this community.

Continuing the group mythology, the excerpt below shows a particular achievement of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community, and the cultural proposition that follows reveals more of the mythic story practiced at the *Creative Mornings*. The story talks about an achievement recognized by the 'West,' by the 'ideal' "progressive" world, which Belarus is commonly compared to as an inferior place. The speaker tells a story that contributes to the overall myth: "Imagine in your head[s], how many maps of Minsk, more precisely, not of Minsk but of the world you had which did not have Minsk on them. I believe, very-very-very many. Two and a half years ago, we understood that

we want that one map would have one more mark of Minsk on it. It seems we have achieved this. After two and a half years, we are on the map of *Creative Mornings*, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities of the world" (3.2.: 10a-15a).

3.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

10. =Представьте в голове, сколько у вас было карт Минска, точнее не Минска,=
10a.=Imagine in your head, how many maps of Minsk you had, more precisely not of Minsk,=
11. =мира, на которых нету Минска. Мне кажется, очень-очень-очень много. Два с=
11a.=of the world, where there is no Minsk. I believe, very-very-very many. Two and=
12. =половиной года назад мы поняли то, что мы хотим, чтобы на одной карте =
12a.=a half years ago we realized that we want that one more map should=
13. =стало отметки Минска больше. Кажется, мы этого добились ((показывает=
13a.=have one more mark of Minsk. It seems, we have achieved this ((shows=
14. =пальцем на карту)). Спустя два с половиной года, мы есть на карте Creative=
14a.=on the map with a finger)). After two and a half years we are on the map=
15. =Mornings и на этой карте есть еще сто восемьдесят пять городов мира. Это=
15a.=of Creative Mornings, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities of the world. This is=
16. =сто восемьдесят пять сообществ- и сто восемьдесят пять умножить на очень=
16a.=hundred eighty-five communities- and hundred eighty-five multiplied by=
17. =много людей, которые просыпаются каждый месяц, так же, как и вы, страдают,=
17a.=many people who wake up every month same as you, suffer as you and=
18. =как и вы и радуются, как и вы. Кажется, это очень классно. (2.0)=
18a.=rejoice as you. It seems that this is very cool. (2.0)=

- *CP10: "Rejoice," because "after two and a half years" of existence "we" appeared "on the map of Creative Mornings" among the "hundred eighty-five cities of the world" (3.2.: 14a-18a)*

This excerpt suggests that to "have one more mark of Minsk" (3.2.: 13a) "on the map of Creative Mornings" (3.2.: 14a-15a) is an achievement because this is an international map where Minsk is recognized as one of the "hundred eighty-five" (3.2.: 15a) other "cities of the world" (3.2.: 15a), thus becoming a part of the global community of like-minded people involved in the *Creative Mornings* projects all over the world. This is important because it shows that things that are done in Minsk and Belarus are not only recognized and known in Belarus itself, as it frequently happens but that this is something bigger, something "progressive," which is recognized by the whole world. This is a

symbolic parity with the 'developed' countries and such cities as "London," "Berlin," "New-York," "Copenhagen," "Toronto," and "others."

It also suggests that the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* community achieve this because they "believe in Minsk" and Belarus in general. This is an example of how the "progressive" world becomes closer as a result of participation in this community. Since *Creative Mornings* exists because of the "people" who are "creative," "talented," "open," "progressive," "European-minded" and who are, in this case, a part of the "international morning sect," it suggests that participating in such communities leads to international recognition and brings the "people" closer to the 'ideal' world which is "same, and even better" than in "Europe or the U.S."

Malinowski (1991) would describe this as a myth of cultural change where heroic deeds which lead to the establishment of customs, cultural forms, and social institutions are reflected in the story (p. 61). It not simply brings "people" closer to the "progressive" world here and now in this story, it also brings them closer to the 'ideal' future where those who "believe in Minsk" and Belarus become the agents of change, and where the "state" has lesser and lesser role in everyday life. This is a kind of the 'ideal' future which Berdyaev (2008 [1948]) would describe as operating on the idea of *sobornost',* where there is a communion of people built on trust, love, and harmony as opposed to the oppressiveness of the existing official forms of sociality (p. 200-204).

6.3 The "amazing people"

The speaker continues in the next excerpt, that they also got help from other "people," from their "partners" (3.3.: 26a) – "the amazing people" (3.3.: 25a) – in this quest of putting a mark of Minsk on the *Creative Mornings* map. The story continues:

“[…] we could not simply come to the street and call: “The Creative Mornings will be here” and start. Definitely not. Two and a half years ago, we came to our first partners and said: “Listen, we do not yet have a community, we do not have people, we just have an idea, we have an approve from two girls from New-York…” That time they say: “Yes, do it” (19a-24a).

3.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

19. =Да, но такая удивительная вещь, то, что мы не могли бы просто прийти на=
19a.=Yes, but such a surprising thing that we could not simply come to the=
20. =улицу, кликнуть: «Здесь будет Creative Mornings» и начать. Кончено нет.=
20a.=street and call: “The Creative Mornings will be here” and start. Definitely not=
21. =Два с половиной года назад, мы подошли к нашим первым партнёрам и сказали:=
21a.=Two and a half years ago we came to our first partners and said:=
22. =«Слушайте, у нас еще нет сообщества, у нас нет людей, у нас есть просто=
22a.=”Listen, we do not have a community, we do not have people, we just have=
23. =идея, у нас есть апрув от двух девушек из Нью-Йорка…». В тораз говорят:=
23a.=an idea, we have an approve from two girls from New-York….” That time they=
24. =«↑Да, делайте это». Кажется, сумасшедшая идея, правда, но именно так
24a.=say: ”↑Yes, do it.” Seems a crazy idea, really, but exactly thus=
25. =рождаются почти все классные идеи. И:и: без удивительных людей, коими=
25a.=are born almost all cool ideas. A:and: without the amazing people, who=
26. =являются наши партнёры, скорее всего, мы бы тоже закончили очень быстро,=
26a.=are our partners, more likely, we would have also ended very fast=
27. =потому, что невозможно каждый месяц печь самостоятельно, невозможно каждый=
27a.=because it is not possible to bake by yourselves every month, it is not=
28. =месяц самостоятельно что-то закупать, поэтому, давайте подарим кусочек=
28a.=possible to but something yourselves every month, thus, let’s give a piece=
29. =своей любви всем нашим партнёрам. А это двадцать плюс партнёров за два=
29a.=of our love to all our partners. And this is twenty plus partners in two=
30. =года. ↑Уау!
30a.=years. ↑Wow!

The following cultural propositions further explicate the ideas from the excerpt above:

- *CP11: Creative Mornings Minsk “seemed a crazy idea,” but “our partners,” the “amazing people,” said: “Yes, do it!” (3.3.: 24a-26a)*
- *CP12: Creative Mornings Minsk “would have ended very fast” without “partners,” “the amazing people” (3.3.: 25a-26a)*

This shows how “amazing people” help other “people” who have “crazy idea[s]” (3.3.: 24a) of creating “communities” (3.3.: 22a) and bringing “people” together,

especially, when these ideas are “approved” (3.3.: 23a) by someone from the “progressive” world – “two girls from New-York” (3.3.: 23a) in this case. As a result, there have been “twenty-plus partners in two years” (3.3.: 29a-30a). There is this belief, which is a part of common mythology, where Belarus, same as some other post-Soviet countries, are perceived as inferior places when compared to Western Europe and the U.S. Hence if something is “approved” or in any other way related to the “progressive” world, then this activity is more likely to be treated as something ‘better’ than the one which is not related to this “progressive” world.

However, *Creative Mornings* and other communities comprised of “the people who burn” – “creative,” “talented,” “open,” and “European-minded” “people,” “who believe in Minsk” are showing that the things in Belarus may be “no worse, maybe even better” than the ones in “Europe or the U.S.,” and with the help of the “amazing people” this becomes possible.

Thus, follows the overall cultural premise which summarizes the ideas from the discourse examined and illustrated above: *Belarus is “really worthy” and is recognized by the rest of the world, because of the “many talented, progressive,” and “amazing people” who “believe” in it.*

6.4 “She came back to Belarus from Switzerland… But why?!”

Another part of the mythic story is related to people who have come back to Belarus from the “progressive” world and stayed here to live. Usually, such behavior and choices are considered as poor choices – it is a common sense that a person cannot simply come back to Belarus from Europe or the U.S. Usually, such people are treated as ‘idiots,’ or as ‘losers’ – idiots because they came to live to a country that has no future, and losers

because they were not able to stay in the “progressive” world. There is a kind of stigmatization of such people. It is also interesting that while these people are still physically in the “progressive” world or somehow affiliated with that world and spend a significant amount of time abroad, they are appreciated more highly than those who constantly live in Belarus. Some people even envy those who live abroad. Some think they are upstarts, because they achieved what they have, and traitors because they left while the rest of the Belarusians are living here and struggling like everyone else.

However, things are starting to change, especially among the “creative” “people,” and among the “people” “who burn.” They have a different take on those who return from the “progressive” world. Those who return are more welcome among the “creative” people than usual because they can share the experience they achieved and implement it in Belarus. This is the part of the story which the excerpt below illustrates.

4.1. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

1. OZ: Буквально год назад, я приехала в Беларусь из Швейцарии. (2.0) Сейчас,=
1a.OZ: Literally a year ago, I have come to Belarus form Switzerland. (2.0)=
2. =у каждого в голове, я прям это вижу, появляется мысль: «↓Она приехала в=
2a.=Right now, in everybody’s head, I really see this, appears a though: “↓She”=
3. =Беларусь из Швейцарии… А почему?!», да, «Что случилось?» :х:х:э «↑Как, как=
3a.=came back to Belarus from Switzerland… But why?!” yeah “What happened?”
:h:h:e “↑How, how=
4. =вдруг так произошло?» Друзья мои, мне очень понравился подход, который я=
4a.=suddenly this happened?” My friends, I really like the approach, which I=
5.=услышала в самом начале выступления Александра, про то, что Беларусь=
5a.=heard at the beginning of Alexander’s presentation, that is, that Belarus=
6. =появилась, Минск появился на карте мира, еще одной и это прекрасно и,=
6a.=has appeared, Minsk has appeared on the map of the world one more [map] and
this is wonderful=
7. =именно, это та причина, по которой я переехала вот, в итоге, из Швейцарии=
7a.=and exactly this is the reason why I moved, as a result, from Switzerland=
8. =в Беларусь, потому, что мне невероятно хочется что-то сделать классное в=
8a.=to Belarus, because I badly want to do something cool in this=
9. =этой стране.=
9a.=country.=

- *CP1: “I moved from Switzerland to Belarus,” because “it [Belarus] has appeared on the map of the world” (4.1.: 1a-6a)*

- *CP2: Since Belarus "has appeared on the map of the world," "I badly want to do something cool in this country" (4.1.: 6a-9a)*

This excerpt starts with the speaker telling a story about her return from Switzerland: "Literary a year ago I have come to Belarus from Switzerland. Right now, in everybody's head, I really see this, appears a thought: "She came back to Belarus from Switzerland… But why?!" yeah, "What happened?" "How, how suddenly this happened?" (4.1.: 1a-4a). This part of the story talks back to this common problem of downgrading Belarus among Belarusians. This discourse, this story about one's return to Belarus from abroad, from the "progressive" world, reflects the wondering about and incomprehension of this kind of personal trajectory by the people present in the room.

However, the speaker further explains the reason for her return: "I really like the approach which I heard at the beginning of Alexander's presentation, that is that Belarus has appeared, Minsk has appeared on the map of the world, one more [map], and this is wonderful, and exactly this is the reason why I moved, as a result, from Switzerland to Belarus, because I badly want to do something cool in this country" (4.1.: 4a-9a). However, this seems to be not enough to explain why someone would come back from Switzerland "to do something cool in this country" (4.1.: 8a-9a) and the speaker involves in a further explanation in the excerpt below to clarify the reasons and rationale behind this personal trajectory, which frequently surprises Belarusians.

4.2. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

10. =Я получаю регулярно предложения уехать в другую страну с каким-нибудь=
10a.=I regularly receive offers to move to another country with some=
11. =проектом и:и: это не так меня вдохновляет, как то, что происходит здесь.=
11a.=project a:and: this does not inspire me the same way as that what is happening here. =
12. =Молодое яркое поколение, очень серьёзные изменения, меня в этой стране не=
12a.=A bright young generation, very serious changes, I haven't been in this=
13. =было с две тыщи седьмого года, я приехала в совершенно другой мир, в=
13a.=country from two thousand seven, I have come to absolutely different world=
14. =другое пространство, я вижу других людей и для меня, в течение этого=
14a.=different space, I see different people and for me, during this=
15. =последнего года, было очень интересно посмотреть, кто Минчане, кто=
15a.=last year, it was very interesting to take a look at who are the Minskers,=
16. =Белорусы, кто те люди, которые будут приходить на мои лекции?=
16a.=who are the Belarusians, who are those people who will be attending my lectures?=

The following cultural propositions summarize the cultural discourse form the excerpt above:

- *CP3: "Moving to another country does not inspire me the same way," because they do not have "what is happening here": "a bright young generation" and "very serious changes" (4.2.: 10a-12a)*
- *CP4: Belarus has drastically changed: after twelve years of absence, "I have come to an absolutely different world, different space" with "different people" (4.2.: 12a-14a)*

The speaker continues: "I regularly receive offers to move to another country with some project, and this does not inspire me the same way as that what is happening here" (4.2.: 10a-11a). Having to say this alludes something about the people who permanently live in Belarus. The speaker has not been in the country for 12 years and have noticed a change between 2007 and now, in 2019. However, it seems that this change has not been so evident for those who did not leave Belarus for long.

As this discourse shows, the change is evident for one who comes back from a long absence but is not so evident for those who did not leave the country for such a long

time. It seems that the change is not so evident when it is a part of the routine social and cultural practices that people are involved in every day while living in Belarus. However, for a person long absent, there is a contrast: “A bright young generation, very serious changes […]” (4.2.: 12a). This shows that everyday life, everyday routines in 2007 have been different from those practiced now in 2019: “I have come to absolutely different world, different space, I see different people, and for me, during this last year, it was very interesting to take a look at who are the Minskers, who are the Belarusians, who are those people who will be attending my lectures?” (4.2.: 13a-16a).

6.5 “This is an amazing story”

The speaker does not stop here and continues with explanations in another excerpt below:

4.3. Creative Mornings Minsk from February 2019 (0:23-9:03)

17. =И я хочу вам сказать, э- всех присутствующих здесь объединяет одна=
17a.=And I would like to tell you, e- all present here are united by one=
18. =потрясающая черта – вы (1.0) свободомыслящие (1.0), у вас есть потребность=
18a.=amazing feature – you are (1.0) free-thinking (1.0), you have a demand=
19. =в самовыражении, но не в самовыражении для того, чтобы доказать, “какой я=
19a.=in self-expression, but not the self-expression in order to prove “how=
20. =крутой”, а для того, чтобы понять, “кто я вообще есть”. И это потрясающе.=
20a.=cool I am,” but in order to understand “who am I at all.” And this is astonishing.=
21. =Вы не хотите никому ничего доказывать, вы просто хотите быть, вы хотите=
21a.=You do not want to prove anything to anyone, you just want to be, you want=
22. =светиться, вы хотите что-то творить, вы хотите делать этот мир лучше и=
22a.=to shine, you want to create something, you want making this world better=
23. =вот ↑это удивительная история, потому, что предыдущие поколения, э:а- как=
23a.=and ↑this is an amazing story, because the previous generations, e:a- as=
24. =показывает мой опыт, пытаются кому-то что-то доказать и с кем-то бороться.=
24a.=my experience shows, are trying to prove something to someone and to fight=
25. =А ну к черту эту войну:, давайте мы будем что-то творить, что-то создавать=
25a.=with someone. Screw this wa:r, let’s be creating ((tvorit’)) something, making something=
26. =и вот за счет этого действительно появится что-то интересного, как у нас,=
26a.=and that is because of this it will really emerge something interesting, like we have,=
27. =да. Это будет не разруха, это будет какой-то креатив и интересное=
27a.=yeah. This will be not a devastation, this will be some kind of creativity=
28. =пространство.
28a.=and interesting space.

The following cultural propositions summarize the discourse from the excerpt above:

- *CP5: Those who come to Creative Mornings "are united by one amazing feature": they are "free-thinking" and "have a demand in self-expression" "to understand who they are" (4.3.: 17a-20a)*
- *CP6: Those who come to Creative Mornings "simply want to be," "to shine," "to create something," and "making this world better," instead of "proving anything to anyone" (4.3.: 21a-22a)*
- *CP7: Instead of "devastation," we are creating ((tvorchestvo)) "some kind of creativity ((kreativ)) and interesting space" (4.3.: 25a-28a)*

The speaker suggests that "all present here are united by one amazing feature – you are free-thinking, you have a demand in self-expression, but not the self-expression in order to prove "how cool I am," but in order to understand "who am I at all" (4.3.: 18a-20a). The speaker suggests that this is something unique, "this is astonishing" (4.3.: 20a), because the people in this discourse "do not want to prove anything to anyone" (4.3.: 21a), they "just want to be" (4.3.: 21a), "to shine"(4.3.: 22a), "to create something"(4.3.: 22a), "making this world better" (4.3.: 22a) – "and this is an amazing story (4.3.: 23a)."

The "story" is "amazing" because this comes in contrast in this discourse with how things have been here before: "The previous generations, as my experience shows, are trying to prove something to someone and to fight with someone" (4.3.: 23a-25a). This suggests that the old ways are not popular among the "people who burn," and instead of "war" (4.3.: 25a) they strive to "create ((*tvorit'*))" (4.3.: 25a), which according to the speaker would lead to "the emergence of something interesting, like we have here" (4.3.:

26a-27a) at *Creative Mornings Minsk*. The speaker suggests that "this will be not devastation; this will be some kind of creativity ((*kreativ*)) and interesting space" (4.3.: 27a-28a).

This part is particularly interesting and talks back to the distinction between *tvorchestvo* and *kreativnost'*. The speaker refers to *tvorchestvo* when saying "you want to create something" (4.3.: 22a) and "let's be creating something" (4.3.: 25a), while she refers to *kreativnost'* when saying "this will be not a devastation, this will be some kind of creativity" (4.3.: 27a). As mentioned earlier, this is the only instance in the *Creative Mornings Minsk* data presented here for the analysis when the speaker uses the concept of *kreativnost'* instead of *tvorchestvo* in discourse. It is also important that the concept of *kreativnost'* is reflected in discourse with the use of the word *kreativ,* which usually refers in communication to the product of *kreativnost'.* However, in this case, *kreativ* becomes the product of *tvorchestvo,* thus emphasizing its deeper existential and philosophical opposition to the state of "war" (4.3.: 25a) and "devastation" (4.3.: 27a) which are the products of "proving something to someone" (4.3.: 24a) and "fighting with someone" (4.3.: 24a-25a) in this discourse.

By using these concepts in this way, the speaker emphasizes the opposition between "creativity" expressed in the form of *kreativ* and "devastation." This "creativity" is manifested and materialized in this case in "something interesting like we have" (4.3.: 26a) at the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. "Creativity" (4.3.: 27a), thus, becomes not merely a quality of people, but it also becomes a quality of "space" (4.3.: 28a), which is "interesting space" (4.3.: 28a) as opposed to the "space" of "devastation" (4.3.: 27a) and "war" (4.3.: 25a). While sounding tautological in English, this example shows that one

can actually "create" (4.3.: 22a; 25a) "creativity" (4.3.: 27a), which implies that *kreativ,* in this case, becomes a result of *tvorchestvo,* but not of *kreativnost'* as is usually the case. The result of public creativity, or *public tvorchestvo* in this case, thus, becomes a particular form of creativity, or *kreativ,* which is not simply a mere material product but is also something that attains deeper existential and philosophical meanings for the people who are involved in its creation, or *tvorchestvo.*

Additionally, the speaker indicates a direction toward some 'ideal' future, where "something interesting" (4.3.: 26a) "like we have" (4.3.: 26a) "will really emerge" (4.3.: 26a) as a result of "creating something, making something" (4.3.: 25a) and which "will be some kind of creativity and interesting space" (4.3.: 27a-28a) as opposed to the state of "devastation" (4.3.: 27a) that has been here before, during "the previous generations" (4.3.: 23a). One the one hand, this links back to Berdyaev's (2008 [1948]) ideas of *sobornost'* and the eschatological striving of people toward the 'ideal' future, which he argues is an inherent quality of Ruthenian/Russian culture. On the other hand, it shows that old ways of "proving something to someone" (4.3.: 24a) and "fighting" (4.3.: 25a) cannot lead to this "creativity ((*kreativ*))" (4.3.: 27a) and "interesting space" (4.3.": 28a), – it is simply "being" (4.3.: 21a), "shining" (4.3.: 22a), "creating ((*tvorit'*)) something" (4.3.: 22a), and "making this world better" (4.3.: 22a) which can lead to this 'ideal' common future – to *sobornost'* – a communion of people based on peace, love, and harmony – 'real' unity of people based on *obschenie*, not on competition and on "proving something to someone" (4.3.: 24a) and "fighting" (4.3.: 24a).

6.6 "Yes, this is possible!"

As the excerpt below illustrates, these beliefs are not merely a collective delusion, but actually result in real changes in the relationships between the "state" and "people," between "the previous generations" and "a bright young generation," between "authorities" and "the people who burn," between the "Soviet-thinking" and "European-minded" "people," between "Kolhoz" and "interesting space," thus resulting in some kind of hybrid products, spaces, and relationships where "state" and "people" come together. As Anzaldua (2012) argues, hybridity allows for not merely assembling the separated pieces together, but rather for the emergence of something third which is bigger than a mere sum of its parts – a *mestiza* consciousness which is both a source of great pain and a result of continual creative motion (p. 101-102). Such consciousness, which results from hybridity, is not simply about uniting and joining the oppositions but is also about questioning the definitions of both poles and giving them new meanings (p. 103), as the excerpt below also shows.

4.4. Creative Mornings Minsk from November 2018 (00:00-15:06)

29. АВ: если вы не были на нашей- на нашем день рожденья, которое было в=
29a.AB: if you have been at our- at our birthday, which was held at=
30. =Национальном Художественном Музее, я думаю, что вам стоит прийти к нам=
30a.=The National Museum of Arts, I think that you should come to us in=
31. =в Феврале девятнадцатого года, потому что в прошлом году, когда был=
31a.=February of the year nineteenth ((2019)), because last year, when it=
32. =Национальный Художественный Музей, у нас всё получилось, это=
32a.=was The National Museum of Arts, we have succeeded, this is=
33. =удивительно, это было удивительно по всем аспектам, что у нас=
33a.=amazing, this was amazing in all aspects, that it turned out not =
34. =получилось не сложно, оказывается можно взаимодействовать с гос.=
34a.=complicated, it appears it is possible to cooperate with state =
35. =структурами, хотя, назвать Национальный Художественный сложно гос.=
35a.*=structures. Although, to call The National Museum of Arts a state structure is difficult,=*
36. =структурой, потому что он был прекрасный. Девушка Лиза, которая всё=
36a.*=because it ((the museum)) was magnificent. The girl Lisa who was=*
37. =говорила: «Да, это возможно!» И это всё возможно, поэтому, вот, в=
37a.*=constantly saying: "Yes, this is possible!" And this all is possible,=*
38. =девятнадцатом году, всех вас здесь мы уже пригласили, мы с вами увидимся.=
38a.*=that is why, that is, in the year nineteenth ((2019)), all of you we have already invited, we will see you.*

The following cultural propositions summarize the discourse for the excerpt above:

- *CP8: "Last year" we have realized that "it is possible to cooperate with state structures" (4.4.: 31a-35a)*
- *CP9: "It is difficult" "to call" some institutions, such as "The National Museum of Art" "a state structure," because state structures are not supposed to be "magnificent" (4.4.: 35a-36a)*
- *CP10: "Last year" has shown that "this all is possible" and that is why "we will see you" at The National Art Museum "in the year nineteenth ((2019))" again (4.4.: 31a-38a)*

On the one hand, this excerpt shows a surprising discovery by the organizers of the *Creative Mornings Minsk*: "It appears it is possible to cooperate with state structures" (4.4.: 34a-35a). On the other hand, it shows a degree of frustration, since "The National Museum of Art" (4.4.: 35a) "was magnificent" (4.4.: 36a) and this is not something that was expected from a "state structure" (4.4.: 35a), it is thus "difficult" (4.4.: 35a) "to call The National Museum of Art" (4.4.: 35a) a "state structure" (4.4.: 35a). This example suggests that "The National Museum of Art" does not fit into the conventional definition of a "state structure," since "this was amazing in all aspects" (4.4.: 33a) and "it turned out not complicated" (4.4.: 33a-34a) "to cooperate with state structures" (4.4.: 34a-35a) in this case.

As a result, "The National Museum of Art" becomes in this discourse something that is both a "state structure" and not a "state structure," some kind of a liminal exterritorial space stuck in-between the "state" and "people," a hybrid space which is a

synergetic third that comes out of the "cooperation" between the "state" and "people." There is no cultural term for this kind of "structure" in this discourse, but it is described through both its opposition and correspondence to the "people" and to the "state," which makes it the province of neither and of both at the same time.

Moreover, this was not a one-time occasion, and the "cooperation" repeated the following year, because "this all is possible" (37a) – "people" and "state" can "cooperate" and create something together, as this example shows. This suggests that public creativity or public *tvorchestvo,* in this case, is not some kind of unique property of the "people who burn," but is rather an outcome of "cooperation" which leads to *kreativ* and "interesting space" as opposed to "proving something to someone" and "fighting with someone" which leads to "devastation" and "war."

Thus, it follows the overall cultural premise: *People come back from abroad because "Belarus has drastically changed" and "what is happening here inspires them more" – "all is possible" now.*

6.7 The myth of cultural change

In this section, I summarize the overall story narrated throughout the two years by the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk*. I combine the pieces from the excerpts and the analysis above into a single narrative, which contains the main ideas presented by the speakers and discussed during this chapter. The story presented below possesses all the basic narrative features identified by Labov (1972), which are abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, result, and coda (p. 363).

When applied to the story below, the narrative features are found in it in the following way: abstract (lines 1-9), orientation (lines 10; 25-28; 33-34; 42-44; 52-53),

complicating action (lines 11-12; 17-29; 31-35; 41-46; 51-54; 57-58), evaluation (lines 1-2; 10-15; 29-30; 35-37; 47-48; 55-57; 60-77), result (lines 12-13; 22-23; 37-40; 48-50), and coda (lines 8-9; 15-16; 57-59; 77-79). This is done to illustrate how multiple parts of the cultural myth discussed in this chapter come together as combined elements of this mythic story told by many, as a single text that can be read as a whole. The story is as follows:

Creative Mornings Minsk and the Myth of Cultural Change

Minsk, and Belarus in general, are "no worse, maybe even better" than such places as "New-York, Berlin, Copenhagen, Toronto, and other." We are "really worthy," because we are able to "make our products" and "projects" in not "very good conditions" "as opposed to those folks" from "London" or "New-York." "We" overcome the difficulties to achieve this state, while "those folks" get it all for granted. "We" here struggle to achieve that, while "those folks" do not. That is why "we" are "really worthy" and that is why one day "we will be giving lectures and master-classes to those folks."

"We were" "at the Creative Mornings in London" and our community in Minsk is "exactly all the same" as there. Creative Mornings Minsk offers "exactly the same experience as in the rest of the world." Minsk is now "on the map" of Creative Mornings and is "absolutely worthy" to be "at the same level" as "London, Copenhagen, New-York, and so on," because we have "many talented, progressive people," like "those folks." "We" "prove" this "every month."

When you participate in our "community," you become "charged for a month and further in advance." Creative Mornings charges you with "progressiveness" as opposed to outdated "Soviet-style" official and state-related practices and allows you to become a part of global experience which is "exactly all the same" as in EU, USA, and other western countries. You do not "have to find something yourselves" anymore, because "we knock on you in stories every month" and call to "come to us."

It is "a morning sect," there is no way out of here, because "you are with us forever." "We wake up at eight thirty AM," "actually, no, we wake up even earlier," "we come here at eight thirty AM," "we listen to wonderful people who come to us to talk about amazing things from a surprising and very interesting side," "we see the partners who believe in Minsk, not like many other Minskers do." "You" are with "us," because in contrast to "many Minskers," you "believe in Minsk," same as "our partners" do.

"Imagine in your head, how many maps of Minsk, more precisely, not of Minsk but of the world you had which did not have Minsk on them. I believe, very-very-very many. Two and a half years ago we understood that we want that one map would have one more mark of Minsk on it. It seems, we have achieved this. After two and a half years we are on the map of Creative Mornings, and this map also has a hundred eighty-five cities of the world." Thus, "rejoice," because "after two and a half years" of existence and because you and "our partners" "believe in Minsk," "we" appeared "on the map of Creative Mornings" among the "hundred eighty-five cities of the world."

Two and a half years ago, "we could not simply come to the street and call: "The Creative Mornings will be here" and start. Definitely not. We came to our first "partners," "the amazing people," and said: "Listen, we do not yet have a community, we do not have people, we just have an idea, we have an approve from two girls from New-York…" It "seemed a crazy idea," but "our partners," the "amazing people," said: "Yes, do it!" Creative Mornings Minsk "would have ended very fast" without "partners," "the amazing people." And thus, Belarus is "really worthy" and is recognized by the rest of the world, because of the "many talented, progressive," and "amazing people" who "believe" in it.

Because Belarus and Minsk have "appeared on the map of the world," "people" come back and move from "Switzerland" and other "progressive" countries and "badly want to do something cool in this country." There are "very serious changes" in Belarus, the country has drastically changed in the last decade. Those who return, they "come to absolutely different world, different space," and "see different people" – "a bright young generation." Those who return "regularly receive offers to move to another country with some project" but "this does not inspire" them "the same way as that what is happening here."

Those who come to Creative Mornings "are united by one amazing feature": they are "free-thinking" and "have a demand in self-expression" "to understand who they are." Those who come to Creative Mornings "simply want to be," "to shine," "to create something," and "making this world better," instead of "proving anything to anyone" and "fighting with someone," like "previous generations" do. This results in the "emergence of something interesting," "some kind of creativity and interesting space" instead of "devastation." Old ways of "proving something to someone" and "fighting" cannot lead to this "creativity" and "interesting space" – it is simply "being," "shining," "creating something," and "making this world better" which lead to this.

Thus, "last year" we have realized that "it is possible to cooperate with state structures." "Our birthday" "was held at the National Museum of Art." It is owned and managed by the "state," but "this was amazing in all aspects" – "It turned out not complicated to cooperate with state structures." However, "It is difficult" "to call" some institutions, such as "The National Museum of Art" "a state structure," because state structures are not supposed to be "magnificent." "Last year" has shown that "this all is possible" and that is why "we will see you" at The National Museum of Art this year again.

Thus, this story talks about the collective struggle of the "creative," "talented," "free-thinking," and "progressive" "people." They struggle with "not very good conditions" which exist in Belarus, with "those folks" from "New York," "London," and

other developed predominantly Western countries, with “older generations” who follow the old ways of “proving something to someone” and “fighting with someone,” with the “complicated” “state structures,” and those who do not “believe” in Minsk and Belarus in general.

The reason they struggle is that they think that they are “really worthy” of being “at the same level” as Western developed countries, or maybe even “better,” because they have to deal with more everyday problems as compared to “those folks” in “New York and London.” To prove that they are “really worthy,” they attempt a quest of “putting a mark of Minsk” on the “map of Creative Mornings.” If they succeed, then they will stand on the same level as the other 185 cities of the world who are a part of the global *Creative Mornings* community.

After two years of struggle, multiple raids to the “progressive” countries, negotiations with foreign overlords – the “two girls from New-York” – from whom they got an “approve,” and with the help of the “amazing people” who allowed them to use their chambers for the gathering of their “international morning sect” and its following, “the mark of Minsk” for the “map of Creative Mornings” was finally earned and successfully placed.

Due to their success, Minsk and Belarus appeared on “one more map” and thus became closer to the world community. Because of this success, as well as due to the successes of others in promoting Minsk and Belarus worldwide, the “people” start to “move back” to Belarus from “Switzerland” and other “progressive” countries. The people who come back to Belarus from the “progressive” world encounter “very serious changes” and “a bright new generation” who chose “simply to be,” “to shine,” “to create

something," and "to make this world better" instead of "fighting" and "proving something to someone" as "older generations do." This change and the "emergence of something interesting," of "some kind of creativity and interesting space" "inspire[s]" those who "move back" to "badly want to do something here," in Belarus, instead of "moving to another country with some project."

When the "creative," "talented," and "progressive" people realized that it is "possible" to "cooperate" with "state structures" and that "cooperation" is "magnificent" and "amazing," they started to believe that their ways work and that they can continue to do what they are doing, because it leads to "creativity" and "interesting space" instead of "devastation" and "war."

6.8 Chapter conclusion

This chapter showed how the participants of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* continuously communicate an alternative cultural myth among themselves, which pictures Belarus as "no worse, maybe even better" than the "progressive" 'developed' countries of mainly Western Europe and Northern America. This cultural myth stands in opposition to the pervasive idea that Belarusian culture and society, the same as some other post-Soviet regions, are inferior to the culture and society of the West.

The myth tells about the "creative people" and their collective struggle with "not really good conditions" that surround them, with "older generations" who "try to prove something to someone" and to "fight with someone," with those who do not "believe" in Minsk and Belarus, and with "those folks from London and New York," who have it all for granted, according to this story. The "creative people," as a result, chose to "simply be," "shine," and "make this world better" instead of "fighting" and "proving something

to someone." They choose to "create" an "interesting space" instead of "devastation" and "war."

The communication of this alternative cultural myth allows for the creation and maintenance of different shared consciousness and identity among the participants of the community where the people learn how to value themselves and their deeds. In this case, the reversal of values becomes possible by symbolically aligning with the similar practices of the "progressive" world and by portraying Belarusians as not merely "no worse" than the Western countries, but also as "even better," because local people are not simply achieving the same results as "those folks" in "London" or "New-York," but they also manage to do this in severe conditions, according to this myth.

On the one hand, such mythology provides examples of successful achievements recognized by the "progressive" world, such as getting a mark of Minsk on the global *Creative Mornings* map among the 185 other cities. On the other hand, it provides examples of successful "cooperation" between the "people" and "state structures," such as the *National Art Museum of Belarus*, and proves that such cooperation is possible. These examples contribute to the overall myth of cultural change, where, according to Malinowski (1991), heroic deeds which lead to the establishment of customs, cultural forms, and social institutions are reflected in the story (p. 61).

Moreover, this mythology also leads to the redefinition of the social environment and offers a different worldview, where "all is possible" and where the prevailing ideas about "state" and "state structures" as social and cultural entities are challenged. The example of the *National Art Museum* shows how "state structures" attain qualities that they were not ascribed before, such as "not complicated" and "amazing." This

"cooperation," in turn, results in the emergence of hybrid spaces, where the "state" and "people" intersect and interact and where new forms of sociality emerge as a result of this cultural synergy.

CHAPTER 7

SOME NOTES ON HYBRIDITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

This chapter looks further into the emerging hybrid spaces in Belarus and attempts to link the findings from the micro-level of everyday communication at the *Creative Mornings Minsk* to a larger level of Minsk and Belarus in general. I provide ethnographic descriptions of three communication events that I observed between May 2016 and August 2018. The events are *Peshehodka (A pedestrian zone)* and *Vulica Brazil (Brazil Street)* urban festivals, and *Poeticheskiy Dvorik (Poetry Yard)* that happened within the *Peshehodka* festival.

I bring these examples to show how official "state" and unofficial "independent" cultural scenes intersect with each other resulting in the emergence of hybrid public spaces. These hybrid spaces, in turn, serve as a means of creating, communicating, and maintaining shared collective identity among its participants as well as a means of introducing and routinizing collective practices alternative to the "state." The main research question addressed in this chapter is: *How identity is cued and made relevant in communication that unfolds within the Belarusian practices of public creativity?* The specific focus is on the following research sub-question: *What are the social and cultural outcomes of public creativity in Belarus?*

I collected the data for this chapter via both participant observation and in-depth ethnographic interviews. The primary data are based on my field notes, while a few interview excerpts are used to complement the descriptions. I also use one excerpt from *DK Bar Poetry Recital*, which reflects a pattern of situated communication that happens

in the poetry communities in Minsk. This excerpt has been selected from a public online video report about Minsk urban poetry, which is available on YouTube. The observations used for this chapter took place in Minsk during May-November 2016 and May-August 2017, 2018. The interviews were conducted during the May-August 2017 observation period.

7.1 Upper town and hybrid creative projects

The *National Art Museum* discussed in the previous section is not the only example of such hybrid spaces in contemporary Belarus, and there are multiple examples of similar "cooperation" that happens here. Below I provide an ethnographic description of one of the most ostensible examples of such "cooperation" – an urban festival held in Minsk from late Spring until early Fall. The festival has started in 2014 and is held every year since.

It was the Summer of 2016. I spent several weekends in a row visiting and taking videos of the activities happening at the Minsk historical district "Upper Town." The district was established around the 12th century and got its current name in the 16th century. It used to be a city center for business and cultural life until WWII when it was mostly destroyed. The district has been reconstructed during the last ten years and has now turned into a vibrant area with multiple venues of street performance and public culture.

The area is a municipal property with multiple cafes, restaurants, and museums that are scattered around the narrow streets of this historic district. All buildings technically belong to the state, but most of the premises are rented out by private business owners. The narrow streets of the *Upper Town* are usually full of people and performers,

especially during the weekends, thus creating a sort of liminal space where state-owned and controlled streets become exterritorial and the boundaries between the official and unofficial blur as the visitors collectively wander from one place to another, play music, perform, make noise, dance, sing, and are not subject to severe state restrictions. The atmosphere of this place resembles the atmosphere of a marketplace described by Bakhtin (1968), where the behaviors and practices otherwise prohibited and proscribed might be manifested. Loud music and noises, as well as group gatherings, especially the ones not sanctioned and approved by the state authorities in advance, are usually restricted in the Belarusian public space. Moreover, such liminal sites that emerge from the places of public performance and street-level creativity allow enjoying anonymity and freedom from social control (Langman & Cangemi, 2004, p. 141).

This area is a good example of how some elements of the official state-organized public practices intertwine with independent and unofficial elements of public creativity. The district is divided into two areas – one is a venue with the official municipal stage where mass open-air concerts are held during the late Spring, throughout the Summer, and early Autumn. This is the home for *Jazz Evenings* and *Classics by the City Hall* projects, facilitated by the municipal authorities that are done with the help of independent organizers and corporate entities. Besides, various *"International culture days"* are held here with the support of city authorities and foreign embassies located in Minsk.

It was around 8 PM when I got there. I came to the official municipal stage located to the left of the old Basilian Cathedral and by the former Holy Spirit Church building, which is now used as Children's Philharmonic Theater and "Upper Town" Concert Hall. In front of the stage, on the opposite side of the square, I could see the renovated City

Hall – a white building with columns and a clock. Before letting me in, the policemen checked me for security reasons and to make sure I do not bring any unwanted items with me. Such items may include, but are not limited to, various oppositional national symbols (ex: 'White-Red-White' flag, 'The Chase' ('*Pahonia'*) coat of arms, or other items considered hazardous or unwanted in the official public context). The stage area was separated by the police and by several horizontal fence-like metallic frames from the rest of the neighborhood.

Several thousand people came to listen to international Jazz performers that evening. I could see diversely dressed people of all ages – from those wearing "Soviet-style" sandals with socks while also holding plastic bags in their hands to hipsters wearing skinny jeans or trousers on suspenders, beards, piercing, undercut hairstyle, and occasional fancy hats. Some people wore suits and dresses. I could see kids sitting on the shoulders of men, smiling, and facing the stage. When the music started playing, people became silent and listened, when the music stopped, I could hear loud noise and clapping. Some people would whistle and shout into the air. When the music starts, I could hear the noise again.

Another part of this area, as I have already mentioned, is the narrow streets of the old *Upper Town*, where multiple cafes, pubs, street venues for public performance and live music are located. Most of the pubs and clubs in the district are open until early morning during the weekends, and thousands of citizens and visitors wander around the streets, interact, and enjoy the vibrant atmosphere. This is a home for the *Peshehodka* project (an approximate translation would be a *'Pedestrian zone'*).

Peshehodka is a city festival which is supported and controlled by the state authorities but is organized by a team of enthusiasts who are responsible for the program, equipment, production, and the whole process at the venue. The festival usually has an official program, which is approved by the municipal authorities, and various spontaneous performances on distinct spots around the area. The activities range from stage music and street dance to live statues and street poets. An additional part of this festival is called the *Music map*, where various street musicians get spots to play music at the subway pedestrian zones around the city. The musicians must be approved by the *Peshehodka* organizers and confirmed with the state authorities before being able to play at the allocated subway pedestrian zones.

I could barely see any police on these narrow streets of the *Upper Town* during the daytime. People here were mostly young, but some of them brought kids. Pedestrians looked relaxed: wandering around, laughing, jumping, chatting, and even drinking alcohol outside in public, which is prohibited in Belarus. I stopped by one of the performance areas, a group of approximately 30 people was dancing Zumba, and the visitors crowded around watching, whistling, clapping, and shooting videos. Many people were taking videos of one particular Zumba dancer – a man with grey hair, dressed in bright green shorts, probably in his fifties, who energetically moved his legs and arms along with music, and radiantly smiled facing the crowd. It felt like everyone here loved this guy.

This brief description above shows how official and unofficial culture intertwines throughout the *Upper Town* area. While it has some elements of state control and ideology involved, especially at the official stage area, it is significantly different from the *Tractor*

Ballet kind of events mentioned earlier. On the one hand, the atmosphere of the marketplace blurs the boundaries between the official and unofficial social practices. On the other hand, this is an example of how alternative sociality is created through the cooperation between the state agencies and authorities with independent performers and organizers, thus becoming a hybrid public space, similar to the *National Art Museum of Belarus*, when described by the *Creative Mornings Minsk* organizers.

While the exterritorial atmosphere of the marketplace may seem familiar for the European and American reader, there is something that distinguishes this place from the similar old town activities in most of the European cities. First, as I have mentioned previously, strict regulations on public assembly across the country make these kinds of events stand out from the regular everyday routines. In addition to being irregular and relatively new, such events bring together both municipal authorities and multiple "active" and "creative" "people" who attend and participate in various forms of street performance and creative communities that convene in this area. These communities convene not only on the streets, but also in the cafes and pubs of this neighborhood, thus creating alternative social spaces where people dance Latina, discuss poetry, or watch movies outdoors.

In this case, street-level culture and public performance not only serve as entertainment but also serve as an alternative to the official social practices, which are not limited to public events such as *Tractor Ballet* discussed earlier. Such alternative social practices transform the urban environment and become an "expanding practice of solidarity […] through which difference and multiplicity can be mobilized for common gain and against harm and want" (Amin, 2006, p. 1020-1021). Public performance and

street-culture maintain within them a possibility of liminality, as they produce moments, when people are "betwixt and between" and due to this, are open to change (Simpson, 2011, 415-416). The venues of public creativity become liminal spaces with the potentiality for cultural creativity and social transformation where cultural creativity may come out of liminality and involves transformative action through the "self-immolation of order as presently constituted" (Turner, 1980, p. 161-164).

Second, there is a continuous creative collaboration that happens in this area between the independent organizers and municipal authorities in one form or another. This area is not just an entertainment district but is also a creative cluster, where state and grassroots interests and initiatives come together. Such clusters bridge together independent and municipal entities in a collaborative process and serve as vibrant areas where culture and arts are involved as important urban regeneration resources (Mommaas, 2004, p. 508-509).

However, the co-existence of both official and unofficial public life in such hybrid spaces sometimes leads to tension between the independent grassroots organizers and authorities. While some types of artistic expression are treated positively and are even backed by the authorities, others may be treated in a different way. In the following section, I provide an example of such tension and turn to the case of the *Poetry Yard* within the *Peshehodka* project.

7.2 Upper town and tension with state officials: *Poetry Yard*

The issues of tension between the independent entities and state authorities are common in Belarus, especially when the political component is involved and when bureaucratic procedures are activated to control and/or restrict certain activities. The same

is true for public creativity and artistic expression. In this case, the way an activity is conceptualized and interpreted matters. If an activity is considered as having political outcomes by the authorities, it may be prohibited or restricted. However, there are no universal criteria by which one might clearly identify which activity is artistic and which is political, as well as what possible effects and outcomes a given artistic expression may lead to. Though many public creative initiatives are mostly independent, state authorities try to make some of them more organized. As I mentioned previously, such popular hybrid projects as *Peshehodka* and *Music Map* are supervised by the state authorities, and thus situations with censorship and contradictions at these hybrid types of events happen. Alex, an independent musician, who frequently plays at *Peshehodka*, suggests that:

Excerpt 1

> That is not because the country is bad, or the people are bad, but simply, well the state has certain rules. […] the state in this regard makes the work slightly difficult for all. That is, for itself and for the musicians, and for the organizers.

Similarly, Alesia, an independent organizer of poetry and performance in Minsk, has commented on the difficulties that exist in cooperating between the regular citizens and state authorities:

Excerpt 2

> […] we are refusing the idea to go to someone into the Department of Culture and take an interview. That is, this already testifies about that, that, well, there are very- barriers, borders between the authorities and, well, - it is simply that we are doing the same thing ((laughs)), but everyone obstructs. Well, that is, well we think that they obstruct us, - they think that it is us obstruct them, ok, we just spoi- spoil everything, ok, spoil.

To show how tension happens between the independent grassroots organizers and state authorities, I now turn to the example of the *Poetry Yard* (*Poeticheskiy Dvorik*) within the *Peshehodka* project. This is a good example of how local authorities have

treated a seemingly apolitical communication event of public poetry recital as a political action.

It was the Summer of 2016. I have just started collecting my data on public creativity and urban culture in Minsk. I have an interest in poetry and write poems myself. Thus the *Poetry Yard* project has immediately attracted my attention since I was looking for a place where I could share my poems and listen to the poems of others.

The *Poetry Yard* gathered on weekends at one of the small squares of the *Upper Town*. The project will only last for three weekends and then will be shut down by the authorities. I have missed the first weekend and have come to the second poetic convention to take a quick look at it. When I came to the scene, I saw a square area with approximately 50-60 people sitting on railings, curbs, and steps facing the speaker – a girl in t-short, blue jeans shorts, and blond hair. The girl stood by the microphone and was addressing the audience in the Belarusian language. She has introduced the next poet, the audience clapped, and another girl in the black dress came to the microphone and started reading her poems from the notebook in Russian: while the mixture of both languages is common, it is usually the Russian language which is used at various public events. People at the scene seemed relaxed. Some of them were smoking; some of them were whispering and chatting with each other. Some people were leaving while new visitors were entering the square. I liked the event and signed up to participate for the following week.

A day before my performance was scheduled, I got a message from the organizers that the *Poetry Yard* was moving from the open public space to *Beercap* – a beer market and a pub located near the initial venue. I did not pay attention to this change, thinking

that this was made on purpose to make the event more enjoyable for the public and participants, since *Beercap* had an actual stage with good sound and tent saving performers from the sun.

However, this was not the case, as I was told later. The girl in blue jeans shorts who organized the event told me that the municipal authorities had prohibited them from convening on the street this time. Additionally, the posters informing the visitors that the *Poetry Yard* has moved to a different location have been taken down by someone soon after they were posted on the streets of *Peshehodka*. The visitors and participants have been able to follow all the changes only on social media affiliated with the project. It was the last weekend the *Poetry Yard* convened.

The *Beercap* stage, though, was located outdoors on the bar premises and thus was not completely hidden from the public: people still were able to hear what was going on and even were able to see, though fragmentary, the audience and the performance. The bar did not charge anything to attend the event for those who would like to take a closer look.

The crucial difference was that the *Beercap* scene was not an open public scene, such as a municipal square plaza where the event took place the previous week. Technically, the *Poetry Yard* was moved out from the official public space into an unofficial, but still public space. Thus, the event became somewhat exterritorial, located in-between the boundaries of official and unofficial sociality. This is an example of a so-called liminal space where street art and culture both blur the distinctions between private and public, between politics and sociality, as well as become central to "establishing

urban communal life" and changing the way people relate to each other in these places (Simpson, 2011, p. 418-419).

This brief example shows how the authorities have treated poetry as a form of art beyond its aesthetic property. There was something beyond simply artistic performance that made authorities to prohibit this convention on the open public space. One of the versions I heard claimed that one of the poets who was supposed to perform that day had previously given an interview to one of the politically oppositional media outlets. It is still not clear, whether it was that, or whether it was because of the public use of Belarusian language, or the content of the poems, or uncertainty about the ways participants would behave in public and how the audience would react, or, maybe, all the above. I can only speculate on this, but the prohibition happened, and this is a fact.

Even though this poetry event seemed ostensibly non-political, an official sanction was taken against them by the authorities. There are multiple poetry conventions in Minsk today, and it seems that the audiences of these conventions and shows may not think of themselves as creating something political. The discussions that happen at such conventions focus on what did the artists perform and how did they perform, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Excerpt 3: A poetry convention in DK Bar

CT1: Why using such-(.) this, I guess, is not a stamp, it is more likely as an atmosphere in gv- let's say, such expressions as "a lump in the throat" (0.2) – this is very boring, no? This is e-e overused- […]

To illustrate how the tension between the independent grassroots organizers and authorities happens at the hybrid creative events, I have shown how seemingly non-political public reciting of poetry was sanctioned by the state and moved from the official public space due to seemingly political reasons. The excerpt above shows that this type

of poetry events does not necessarily have any ostensible political goals and purposes. However, as I have shown earlier in text, art is not simply aesthetic, but social.

The artistic product, an artwork, along with its meaning and social outcomes, thus, becomes not merely a result of its creation by a single artist, but a product of interaction between the various people and social groups, between the poets and authorities, between independent producers and municipal venues, between the street artists and public at the urban scene. This is concordant to Becker's (2008) suggestion that art is not a product created by a single person but is rather a result of collective action. This collective character of any creative work presumes that authorities also become a part of this public creative process no matter whether they restrict or allow certain activities. In this respect, both tension and cooperation are inalienable parts of public creativity and ongoing social and cultural changes in Belarus.

7.3 *Brazil Street* and independent creative initiatives

While the previous sections have addressed the issues of liminality and hybridization of the public space, as well as touched upon the tensions which exist between the independent grassroots organizers and authorities at such spaces, this section attempts to show how alternative social spaces are created and maintained by independent and grassroots initiatives. The main difference between this type of events and the hybrid form is that state authorities are not directly involved in the production and creative process at these events and communities that group around them. This allows for more freedom and autonomy in social and creative expression among participants. The lack of state control also allows for the creation of alternative social and cultural practices along with the manifestation of alternative group identities in these communities.

I enter the *Oktyabrskaya (October) Street* – an old industrial neighborhood of Minsk. I pass the red-brick buildings, which are mostly abandoned and sold or rented out by the local state-owned factories. The district is within walking distance from the *Upper Town* and city center but is located aside from the living areas. The walk from the center takes approximately 15-20 minutes, but one can also use the subway to be there in about five. Its somewhat marginal location allows for 24/7 ongoing activities in the neighborhood.

The area has several bars and cafés, art-hubs with galleries and interior performance venues, as well as a wide road which is mainly used as a pedestrian zone. Some of the premises still belong to the municipal authorities and state factories. Some of the buildings have been recently bought from the state by *BelGazpromBank*. The bank is known for its investments in art and culture across the country and is transforming these premises into a cultural cluster with art-gallery, art-hub, and dining area.

Some of the factories are still operating, and occasionally one can smell what the local liquor works are producing. That day, I could not smell any traces of liquor production. I smelled dozens of odors from the street food court instead. There are several stages with music performers and DJs scattered across the neighborhood – a roughly one square kilometer area. I enter the food court and hear electronic Latino music mix playing. A DJ is sitting by the side of the food court area, which is comprised of several rows of food trucks, kiosks, stands with grills, and other strange-looking booths that cooked and sold food right on the street. I get lasagna. It is delicious.

People around me are smiling and chatting. Some are moving along with the music. Some are sitting at the tables; some are busy consuming their food. Everyone

seems so chilled and relaxed: I see lots of smiling faces and can hear people laughing. Most of the visitors are young. I do not see the elderly, but there are people with kids, though. People wear shorts and light dresses. The sun is up.

I move forward through the neighborhood. The walls of the old factory buildings are painted with artworks – murals and graffiti. Some of these murals represent Belarusian wildlife and folklore – like the one with the bison or the one with an old bard dressed in the traditional outfit. Some murals are abstract. These artworks are the outcome of the *Vulica Brazil* project, which involved the artists from Brazil and other countries painting buildings and walls across the city of Minsk during the last three Summers. I see people taking pictures of themselves with artworks. Sometimes there is a line. Some of these murals have been internationally acclaimed and have drastically changed the way the city looks today – the buildings look alive.

Later in the evening, a Brazilian carnival with loud music, dances, and drums will start. However, I have to leave – I can watch it on the Internet later – some people are broadcasting and uploading videos as the event happens. One can always see what is going on in these vibrant spaces online while being somewhere else. Though, one of my interlocutors expressed some concerns about social media use and stressed that "many people are becoming lazy and simply watch it all online at home instead of going out in person."

The difference between this place and the *Upper Town* is its relative autonomy from the official state social practices – the activities that take place in the area are independent of the state ideology and do not involve constant municipal supervision, especially in the interior venues. Usually, you would not notice police on the street, unless

something extraordinary happens. This is a hip neighborhood abundant with street-art, which attracts all kinds of visitors. Dreadlocks, black nails, blue lips, bright shoes, short pants, blazers, undercuts, Afro and Indian outfits, piercing, tattoos, tobacco pipes, high heels, expensive watches, and backpacks are usual here during the day and throughout the night. This is also one of the places where bikers hang-out at night – there is plenty of space to park, there are cheap kebabs and coffee, and there are no severe noise restrictions after 11 PM. This is not a typical municipal public space, and thus it is also exterritorial, similarly to the *Peshehodka* in the *Upper Town*.

Unlike *Tractor Ballet*, which is abundant with the official state ideology and state-promoted culture, and the *Upper Town* where official state cultural practices intertwine with the grassroots initiatives resulting in the emergence of exterritorial liminal spaces, the *October Street* and *Vulica Brazil* serve as examples of how Belarusians continuously create alternative social spaces and communities through the independent and autonomous practices of public creativity. *Vulica Brazil* is a most ostensible example from the variety of smaller creative practices scattered throughout the city. Such independent creative practices happen all year round both indoors and outdoors, thus bridging people together based on the collective participation in the alternative to the "state" cultural practices. These practices trigger the process of cultural creativity and social transformation on the local grassroots levels due to their popularity among the "people" and due to their persistence over time, which allows introducing the alternative to the "state" forms of everyday public life.

Whether such initiatives are made completely autonomously or in cooperation with the "state," they all create alternative social spaces where regular citizens could

experience something different from their everyday lives. Such public creative practices and communities which grow around many of them disrupt regular routines and allow people to emerge into something colorful, unique, and free, as opposed to grey, standardized, and restricting routines of official Belarus.

Such independent practices create an alternative unofficial Belarus where every visitor and participant makes a difference, where every individual is able to create and manage the social environment by involving in the various forms of public creativity. In a sense, the phenomenon of public creativity in modern-day Belarus is somewhat similar to Bakhtin's (1968) idea of carnivalesque, where carnival serves as a way to liberate and subvert the prevailing atmosphere through laughter and transgressive social behavior. The main difference here though is that public creative practices discussed here do not simply liberate for the moment of the event or carnival, they create a continuous flow of liberating spaces and practices of alternative social identity and urban solidarity, which potentially may become a part of the daily social routine thus bringing two parallel Belaruses closer to each other through this liminal experience, which is available for everyone willing to participate.

These public creative practices are not merely unofficial folk culture that is present on marketplace during the carnival periods in Bakhtinian sense, but this modern-day public creativity is an all-year-round enactment of alternative social spaces where alternative shared identity may be celebrated through the collective dismantling and co-creation of social routines, thus allowing for the different sociality to emerge through this collective creative action.

Bakhtin (1968) argued that the marketplace has always enjoyed a certain exterritoriality, it remained beyond official order and official ideology, and thus it always remained "with the people" (p. 154). Similarly, public creativity as social phenomena remain "with the people," thus existing simultaneously within and beyond the official order and ideology, thus creating a space beyond everyday sociality, thus continually creating and moving toward a new everyday sociality.

7.4 Chapter conclusion

In this section, I have discussed public creative practices as a modern-day Belarusian phenomenon. While some of them may resemble regular European festivals and fairs, when considered in the Belarusian context, where the public assembly is restricted, these creative practices attain additional political and social qualities. Public creativity provides liberating experience and bears with it a potentiality for social transformation. Emerging as an opposition to the everyday social routines and against the state monopoly on public assembly, these creative practices move beyond the level of artistic expression and become a way to bind people together through the willing collective action. They serve as "membering" practices, which in their enactment bind Belarusians participating in them into a common people with shared identities.

Public creativity is not merely something alternative to the official culture. It is also something that transforms the official culture by incorporating alternative social elements into everyday routines. The hybrid creative practices of the *Upper Town*, similar to the ones discussed regarding the *National Art Museum*, show how municipal authorities and grassroots initiatives intertwine, thus creating something new in the public space. Similarly, by lessening public control, state authorities allow the citizens to build

their own social environment and to show others through these independent collective activities that alternative ways of social interaction are possible and that they do not subvert the existing social order but organically complement it making it more manageable and bearable for everyone.

This is the way "two parallel Belaruses" are coming together through the liminal moments of public creative action. Since each of these "Belaruses" is not a constant on the space-time continuum, the process of dismantling and social transformation is ongoing, thus continually incorporating new emerging social practices into the everyday social routines. The society changes itself, and these emerging public creative practices in Belarus are a prominent example, which makes this transformative social process highly visible.

This means that similar transformative processes of social change may be found elsewhere, but public creativity, same as carnival described by Bakhtin, is something that stands out among the other ongoing transformative processes within a society, thus providing vivid examples of the ongoing transformation that can be easily accessed and described, because the places where public creativity happens are exterritorial and thus are open for everyone willing to access them and to participate in them. Public creativity, in this case, is not so much about art, but it is more about the social outcomes of the collective creative action, and thus, the concept may potentially be used as a lens for studying social transformation in general.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Nature, scope, and limitations of the study

This is a study of cultural discourses which focused on the analysis of what people say when they talk in and about the practices of public creativity in Belarus. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study was a discursive unit, not an individual. Most of the claims presented in this study have been made based on what people said in the interviews and what they reflected in discourse when participating in meetings at *Creative Mornings Minsk.* This means that while some of the cultural key terms and concepts may be found in other communities involved in public creativity in Belarus, some of them might not be present or relevant to the same extent to other similar communities in the country.

This study claims that there are certain ways of speaking about and communicating the Belarusian identity among certain public groups and that these ways have been found as significant to the participants in the discourses examined. The same is true for the communicative forms – *social drama*, *myth*, and *ritual* – which have been addressed in this study. These discourses contain cultural premises and propositions about things that are considered important and culturally meaningful for the public examined. While the general key traits described here may be found in other communities and other discourses in Belarus, it does not mean that people will use them or will talk about them exactly the same way as described in this study.

This study also demonstrates an example of how ethnography of communication and cultural discourse analysis (CuDA) can be used to (1) identify prevalent meanings

and ranges of meanings about social phenomena in discourse, (2) to formulate underlying cultural assumptions and patterns which are based on sometimes unspoken beliefs and values, (3) to link these ranges of meanings, assumptions, and patterns to broader social, cultural, and historical contexts. This framework also allows comparing opposing or parallel meanings and cultural patterns that are found in discourse to show the complexity of social and cultural relations reflected in situated communication in and about certain phenomena and/or practice. This approach also allows evaluating these relationships and critically assessing these cultural patterns from the standpoint of the communication participants themselves, which gives valuable insights into the ways participants themselves see and perceive their social and cultural environments.

This study and its scope have several limitations. One such limitation is the use of interviews as the primary source of data in chapter 4. As well-known, interviews are not the best way to get accurate information about the outside world as people might omit particular details, overemphasize things, or mislead the interviewer in some cases. Thus, the information gathered during interviews should be checked. One way to check this information is to observe the participants in the contexts they mentioned during interviews and to see whether they do things in line with what they have reported. In order to check the relevance of the information gathered during the interviews, I spent a total of 19 months in the field over four consecutive years. As a citizen and native of Belarus, I am also a cultural insider, which allows me to reflect on the key cultural codes found in discourse in more detail.

Another limitation of this study is that it focused on the analysis of a single communication event *Creative Mornings Minsk* which means that in my analysis, I

favored depth over breadth. I have deeply analyzed the discourse in this community but did not do the same for other related communities. Looking at other communities involved in public creativity in Minsk and Belarus, in general, may benefit in refining the findings of this study, comparing key cultural assumptions and terms found in discourse in other communities, and looking for other relevant cultural patterns that might be present in discourse in other related public spaces.

Additionally, I have mostly focused here on analyzing the independent grassroots initiatives while not paying as much attention to the "state" owned and controlled spaces and communities that group around them. Many such spaces and communities may be rather difficult to approach, but if approached, they can give valuable information about the key cultural assumptions, patterns, and meanings that are prevalent among the participants of such communities and spaces. Comparing the discourses found in the grassroots and official state-owned communities and spaces may allow refining and complementing the current findings of this study.

8.2 Summary and discussion of findings

The initial rationale for this research project, when it just started, was to tell a story about Belarus from the perspective of its dwellers to problematize the existing media and academic accounts about the country. In the process, it transformed into the research of how "active," "creative," and "more European-minded" Belarusians interact with Belarus on public and create new social and cultural routines through their interaction with public spaces and each other.

However, considering the nature of the topic – the nature of creativity in our everyday lives – this was not the final transformation of this research. In the end, this

project became a study of social and cultural dynamism, a study of transformation itself and its role in building and maintaining social unity through collective creative endeavors – it became a study of the process of change as an inherent component of living itself. Thus, there are several levels of findings as a result of this study.

More specifically, on one level, I showed how locals communicate six cultural identities and four cultural groups when they speak about public creativity in Belarus. Additionally, I showed how the participants structure these categories as oppositional cultural codes, such as "state" vs. "people" or "indifferent people" vs. "talented, really creative people," and how these discursive oppositions reflect a similar dynamic found in Ruthenian/Russian culture where continuous interplay of opposing values has been a foundation of cultural unity throughout the history.

On another level, I showed how the participants of these grassroots communities problematize the existing ideas and practices of being a Belarusian and of being a citizen in general. The prevailing cultural myth suggests that Belarus, like many post-Soviet spaces, is inferior to the "progressive" "West" and the "USA." However, this is not the way Belarus is symbolically constructed in the grassroots communities I studied. The Belarus they envision living within is a place of togetherness, of synergetic cooperation, and with the emergence of alternative mythology and everyday routines out of which cultural, business, and social innovations arise.

What is important here is the existence of oppositions, a dualism, as an inherent part of this creative process. The data from this study show, at least on the Belarusian case, that if there is no opposition, there is no unity. This opposition allows the form to appear, to become visible. The form thus becomes possible through the interplay of

oppositions; alternative forms trigger the process of change and transformation in the culture.

What this suggests is that culture cannot exist without negations, without contradictions and conflicts – it is the sum of contradictions which allows for the appearance of the collective common form. There is always a process of interaction, of communication of the opposite elements, of the opposite forms, which leads to the processual unity in a society. A society cannot be uniform. The unified common form is a result of contradicting and opposing forces that are playing out through the wills of people who share common values, sometimes completely opposite values about the common past, present, and future.

The thing is not in that the duality is universal, but in that each particular duality is a unique duality. By learning what is unique about the particular duality, we learn how this culture transforms and evolves, what are the rules by which it operates, and which kinds of transformations are possible in this particular place. However, the existence of duality is still a universal phenomenon, and thus each particular duality can be seen as a part of the multifaceted global whole, of the global cultural process with local peculiarities. Duality is universal, but also unique and particular in each culture and place.

Similarly, I argue, that synergy, the embrace of oppositions and reinvention of them in the collective whole, is a universal process, but this process is globally particular and peculiar. By learning particular cultural ways this synergy is achieved, we learn about more and more ways culture and society as a whole can evolve. We look at particular cases to understand the universe and its multiple faces – in a sense, they all have a face, which is universal, but the faces are different, which is unique and particular.

On yet another level, my research suggests that the process of creativity, in its essence, is a process of innovation, transformation, and change. The data from this study suggest that such creative transformative processes in the society involve conflict, opposition, a struggle with everyday reality, out of which innovations come to life.

What this study shows is that there is a striving toward resolving existing conflicts and toward bringing oneself and the environment around to some kind of ideal state, ideal future, ideal form – a process that never reaches its end, but which never stops because of this vector. One thing changes another, but the ideal state does not come, because there is always an opposition, there is always a rotation, there is always an idea of something that is not what we have now, and there is a leaning toward it, toward that what we do not have, but potentially could have.

Thus, we strive to something alternative to what we have because the world we live in is not ideal – this is how culture and society seem to be operating based on the Belarusian case, which can also be true in many other places as well. There is an eschatological component inherent in the creative process since the creative process is always directed toward the future. In the case of communities, there is a striving toward an ideal collective future, at least this tends to be true for Belarus and post-Soviet space, especially for that part of it which shares the elements of Ruthenian/Russian culture.

Thus, knowing what conflicts, challenges, and problems the people face in their everyday lives and how they themselves define these conflicts, challenges, and problems, one can better understand regular everyday life in a particular place and particular moment.

Even though urban festivals and public creativity discussed in this study may seem for some as merely a form of cultural consumption, they are much more than this. The analysis illustrating that they underlie cultural rituals that bond community together shows that economic, class, and power relations are not of the primary concern here. The primary concern is the ability to create and become parts of the particular kind of social scenes which are built by the community in contrast with regular everyday routines – they are eschatological travel toward the future ideal, which is based on 'pure' and 'proper' relations among the "people."

It is not to say that it is better or worse than the "state," but to say that it originates out of the belief that this is a proper way of how things should be, but since it is an inclination toward an ideal, it is just another stage in this collective travel to future. As we know, the ideal state cannot be reached, but this does not mean people cannot strive for it. This striving is a creative force in this culture, and maybe in other cultures as well. Eventually, as more than ten centuries of history show, this stage will most likely be followed by another one and so forth – this constant rotation and mutual penetration of opposing values, which is reflected in the discourse, seems to be a general trait of Ruthenian/Russian culture, the duality of which constitutes unity. Again, this tendency may also be true for other places on our planet as well.

Saying that unity is built of oppositions does not mean that there are two poles, rather there is a constant interplay among the diverse values and ways of living or communicating in the society and culture which move forward and develop due to constant tensions. Take out tensions, and development in this form will stop. There

probably are other ways to develop, but in this culture, tension and oppositions have been shown to be essential for its maintenance, transformation, and change throughout history.

In the discourse examined, real change is more than a change in form. It is rather a metaphysical, existential change that matters the most. Real change and social transformation, thus, is not simply changing the form or a social formation but is rather a change in the spirit of a community, change is deeper than simply a change of cultural forms, and no physical change thus is possible without changing the inner selves first.

This is what "creative" people from my study reflect in their common myths, their collective story of cultural change and collective struggle – it is "simply to be," "to shine," "to make this world better," "to create an interesting space" instead of "proving something to someone," instead of "fighting," instead of "devastation" and "war." However, without this collective struggle with reality, without the existence of these contradictions and conflicts with the environment, the change is not possible, because otherwise there will be no reason to create or "to make this world better."

Public creativity is not about art or cultural consumption. It is not about the "performance," it is about togetherness, *obschenie*, routine everyday collective creation and re-creation, maintenance, and transformation of the community and the world around it. It is both about the material and existential elements of everyday lives. It is material in the sense that it is directed toward the creation of new social, cultural, and material forms – the products of creativity (*kreativ*). It is existential in a sense that it is driven by and is directed toward the creation and recreation, maintenance and transformation of the group philosophical groundings – existential ideas about the community as a part of the world, of the universe, which involves the eschatological component – the belief in the common

ideal future of ‘true’ and ‘just’ society, a future ideal world, where there are no ‘evils’ of today, of the ‘evil’ social reality of today.

Public creativity is always here and tomorrow – it is happening as a response to the existential now but is directed toward the ideal future. Thus, it is always a process because there is always ‘now,’ but since it is never ‘ideal,’ there is always ‘future.’ There is always a movement, a dynamism, an interplay of oppositions between now and the future. These oppositions may be expressed in different forms, but the essence of oppositions is perpetual movement, the essence is life itself, where change and dynamism are its inalienable essential elements. This is what public creativity refers to, and this is what underlies the duality of Ruthenian/Russian culture discussed here, this is what the multiple oppositions found in the discourse examined refer to. This is what the idea of public creativity encompasses in its most general and universal sense. This is its real nature and essence.

It is out of conflict with now, with the reality as it is, that people involve into public creativity – in order to face it and to change it – every bit of living is permeated with this conflict – change does not happen out of harmony, but the want of ‘love,’ ‘peace,’ and ‘harmony,’ the want of a ‘just,’ ‘true,’ and ‘real’ world may be the reason why people involve into this change.

‘True’ and ‘real’ does not mean ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but it means that different people, groups of people, and cultural entities may have their own ideas about what is ‘true’ and ‘real.’ This is not about morals, but about universals – the general principles of change in cultures and societies. It seems that creativity might be happening out of the necessity to change, to change ourselves and things around us to resolve tensions and contradictions,

inner and outer conflicts, the lack of something that is required to reach a better state of the things, both individually and collectively. This suggests that there is an unresolved conflict, a contradiction, at the core of creativity. Creativity, thus, becomes an attempt and a process of resolving contradictions.

I have also talked in this study about the role of "communication," or its specific local form – *obschenie*, which serves as a totemizing ritual in which togetherness is celebrated. "Communication," thus becomes an inherent part of public creativity which is not merely a form that is ostensible for an outside observer but is also a process of building and maintaining this togetherness through time and space. This means that *Creative Mornings Minsk* is not merely a product of culture made for cultural consumption by urbanites, but what is more important, it is a process of creation of a new cultural form where collective identity is communicated and shared among the participants. Which, in turn, leads to the growth and evolution of the community and the introduction of new collective routines.

Multiple instances of transformation and change in our lives go unnoticed, especially if these changes happen on micro levels of everyday interaction where new ways of living and acting are continuously introduced, routinized, and normalized. As a result, minor transformations and innovations in the culture are taken for granted, since all these changes organically become parts of our everyday lives. We tend not to see the ongoing change if it is not abrupt and sudden. We tend not to see how we create on an everyday basis, both individually and publicly, in our interactions with this world and with others, if it does not lead to some outstanding results.

Transformation and change are not evident, but they are always there. They are always there to acknowledge and to study as well. The main point is asking the right questions about everyday routines and reality the people find themselves in. This is true for both physical and digital environments, which are more and more interconnected today.

I end this discussion with the following statement about the nature of creativity, "communication," and change based on the Belarusian discourse examined: *"Communication" is an act and process of creation, while creativity is an act and process of change…*

8.3 Potential implications and contributions

This study has been in dialogue with several groups of literature throughout the analysis. One such group is the theories of Ethnography of Communication, Cultural Communication, and Cultural Discourse Theory. This dialogue has been both theoretical and methodological in nature. I will first discuss the theoretical contributions of this study and then will turn to the discussion of its methodological implications.

The general theoretical stance of this study was grounded in the idea that communication is an inherent part of everyday activities, and in order to study communities, a scholar should look at practices of communication in unfolding live situations, or communication events as Hymes (1962; 1972) suggested. Additionally, following Philipsen (1987; 2002), this study treated communication as a conversation – an unfolding practice of building and maintaining a community by affirmation and creation of shared identity through the most characteristic communicative forms, such as rituals, myths, and social dramas. These characteristic forms were borrowed by Philipsen

(1987; 2002) from the studies of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969; 1974; 1980) and have been eventually incorporated into the theory of Cultural Communication as it exists today.

One more theoretical premise of this study lied in the idea that communication is not simply a way to create and maintain shared identity through various communicative forms and practices, but that what is being done by people in particular times and places is reflected in discourse, in the meta-cultural commentary that the participants provide in and about their activities as individuals and groups. Thus, Carbaugh (2007) suggested that the participants of communication events reflect in the discourse on their identities, feeling, relationships, acting, and dwelling. Moreover, the participants not only provide such meta-cultural commentary about them as a part of a particular humanity that is presumed in that community, but they may also reflect about the kind of communication practice that is being done in a particular context – a form of communicating about communication through various terms for talk (Carbaugh, 2017).

This study adds two important points to the above literature. First point talks back to Philipsen's (1987; 2002) and Turner's (1980) discussion of communication as a means of creation and affirmation of shared identity, of maintaining a balance between the individual and the communal so that a group of individuals could exist together as a community. For both Turner (1980) and Philipsen (1987; 2002), the community is something that creatively reflects on their past, and that is built and maintained here-and-now through various communicative forms, such as rituals, myths, and social dramas.

This means that there is a continuity between the collective past and collective present as it currently unfolds. This, however, does not say much about the collective

future – the group shared ideals reflecting ideas about the future of their humanity, which can also serve as a means of creation and affirmation of group identity. What my study shows is that communication is not merely a resource for knowledge about the ideal ways of interaction here-and-now and not simply a means by which a community is practiced here-and-now, but also a resource for knowledge about the particular collective future and a means of following a shared path toward the group future ideal. Communication does not simply reflect on the past and is not simply accomplished now; it also presumes the existence of a particular communal future.

Thus, it is not just a community of now that is created and maintained through communicative forms, such as myth, ritual, and social drama, but also the shared road to the future is chosen by the participants. A community of the future is enacted and practiced in and through communication and is discursively reflected upon by the participants. The cultural actors participate not simply in the collective past and present but also become members of the presumed collective future, the traces of which are found in rituals, myths, social dramas, and, possibly, in other communicative forms of building and maintaining a community.

Another contribution of this study is that it provides an example of how communication not merely allows for creating and maintaining shared identity but also results in the creation, affirmation, and maintenance of shared social and cultural spaces. A shared social and cultural space does not have to be physical, though it can unfold at particular milieus and may result in the emergence of new physical public spaces. It is somewhat similar to the space of *communitas* discussed by Turner (1974), where

communal "wholeness," a real source of interconnection among people, is reflected (p. 47).

What I am trying to say is that this study shows how in and through communication people challenge, maintain, and create both communities and spaces where these communities become possible. Eventually, this can be a discursive or a physical space, a space of shared ideas, a space of shared feelings, a space of shared dwelling, a space of shared memories, a space of shared ideals about now and future, and so forth. Both shared identity and shared social and cultural space are required for the creation, affirmation, and maintenance of a community through time.

The main product and outcome of shared socio-cultural space is togetherness as a form of collective unity. This togetherness includes reflection on the past, incorporation of it into the present, and introduction of the common path toward the future ideal – an eschatological element of the communal life discussed by Berdyaev (2008 [1948]) in relation to the Ruthenian/Russian culture. The example of the communication practice of *obschenie* addressed in this study shows how both a space of unity and a sense of shared humanity are enacted, created, maintained, and transformed by cultural participants. I show this both on the examples from the Soviet *tusovki* of the 1960s described by Yurchak (2005) and on the example of the *Creative Mornings Minsk* and similar modern-day public creative practices in Belarus.

There are also some methodological contributions from this project. One such contribution is that it provides an example of how all five analytical modes of Cultural Discourse Analysis (CuDA) can be applied to a single study. Thus, this study employs the theoretical mode of CuDA when it conceptualizes the Belarusian case as a

communication case, which puts its affordances and restrictions on what can and cannot be the particular foci of investigation. This study employs the descriptive mode of CuDA when I bring in the verbatim transcriptions of the meta-cultural commentary provided by the cultural participants themselves.

The interpretive mode of CuDA is employed when I select the most prominent cultural key terms about identity, acting, and relating present in discourse and provide participants' own cultural propositions and premises about the role of these terms in making sense of Belarusian community in its relation to public creativity. The comparative mode of CuDA is used when I select and compare those cultural key terms and oppositional cultural codes found in discourse provided by the participants. It is here when I address the relationships between the six different identities and describe their corresponding cultures as reflected in discourse about Belarus.

Finally, the critical mode is applied when I use participant's own moral judgments and evaluations of particular groups or activities and also bring in other scholars' conceptual insights to explain the relationships reflected in the participants' judgments. It is here when I talk about the duality of Ruthenian/Russian culture discussed by Uspenskij & Lotman (1996), historical opposition between "state" and "people" discussed by Cherniyavskaya (2010), the relationship between language and identity in Belarus today as discussed by Vasilyeva (2019) and Fabrykant (2019) and in the historical perspective as discussed by Ignatouski (1919), Miller & Dolbilov (2006), Ioffe (2007; 2008), Goujon (2010), Cherniyavskaya (2010), and Wilson (2011). It is also at this stage when I introduce Berdyaev's (2008 [1948]) ideas about the eschatological component of the Ruthenian/Russian culture and its direction toward an ideal future, as

well as Berdyaev's (1916; 2018) ideas about *tvorchestvo* ('creativity') as a part of creating unity.

I have also been in dialogue with the existing studies of Belarus that focused on nation-building and national identity (e.g., Marples, 1999; Kuzio, 2001; Ioffe, 2007; Ioffe, 2008; Wilson, 2011, Fabrykant, 2019); politics, identity, and democratic process (e.g., Ioffe, 2008; Wilson, 2011; Becus, 2014; Bedford, 2017; Bedford & Vinatier, 2017); and collective and historical memory (e.g., Ioffe, 2008; Goujon, 2010; Wilson, 2011). The main problem of most of those studies has been a lack of cultural perspective as perceived by the Belarusians themselves. As a result, the studies of Belarus rarely went outside of the politics-language-oppression-dictatorship trope, which prevails in existing academic accounts, especially in Western academia.

To challenge this familiar trope, I have conducted a study of Belarusian cultural discourses about public creativity as I saw the vast proliferation of urban festivals, creative hubs, public performances, forums, and conventions as something that does not go in line with the dictatorship and oppression trope well. As a result, I have been able to provide a different conceptual framework for describing and analyzing Belarus and its culture and society.

One thing that I have shown is that Belarusian identity is manifold and that the Belarusian language is not a universal marker that can be used to identify who is a 'proper' Belarusian and who is not. Though language issue is an important issue for communicating and maintaining identity in Belarus, it becomes clear that it is not the primary value for at least some groups of people who live in the country. I have shown

that it is rather what people do than what language they speak becomes vital in communicating a sense of shared identity and in uniting people.

This becomes clear when we look deeper into the cultural key terms I found in discourse about public creativity, such as "the people who burn" who actively change the environment, or "indifferent people" who care about their personal well-being, or "more European-minded people" who come in place of "Soviet-thinking people" and "authorities" who "create something for themselves" and "do not care about those who are talented, really creative." All this shows that the relationships among the various cultural groups in Belarus are much more complex than the previous studies in this field have shown.

Another important thing I addressed in this study is the emergence of hybrid public spaces and the possibilities of cooperation with the "state." While many of the previous studies have shown how oppressive is the Belarusian regime, especially politically, they seemed to ignore the issues of positive cooperation between the "state" and "people." I have filled this gap and have shown how hybrid public spaces where official and unofficial culture and forms of public life mix together and create something that is "not complicated" or "amazing," such as *Peshehodka* urban festival or the case with the *National Art Museum* described by the organizers of the *Creative Mornings Minsk*.

I am not saying that the previous studies have been wrong in showing the oppressive sides of the Belarusian regime. Instead, I am trying to say that by focusing on the negative sides of the Belarusian society, most of the positive sides have been omitted from the scholarly discourse. Additionally, I have shown how this persisting conflict with

the reality, where the lack of civic freedom is a part, and the existence of oppositional forces in the Belarusian society becomes a means of public creativity, social transformation, and change, as well as one of the driving forces of building and maintaining collective unity among the different cultural groups in the Belarusian society. This conflict, thus, is an inherent part of the local cultural process where the existence of opposing values is a historical phenomenon rooted in the common past.

All this offers a more balanced way to look and evaluate Belarusian society and its various cultural processes and actors. I believe that this conceptual framework should be beneficial for politicians, journalists, tourists, researchers, academics, and other people who would like to know more about Belarus and the surrounding region. This information may be helpful for those who will need to evaluate the ongoing processes in the country for any reasons, such as crafting and introduction of foreign policies aimed at Belarus, choosing whether to invest in certain Belarusian initiatives or whether to support financially certain social and public activities, research, and cultural projects. This information will also be useful for those who come to Belarus as tourists or official visitors, for those who write and create media accounts about the country and its people, and for those who are willing to understand the people of Belarus a bit better.

8.4 Future research

This study was guided by overarching questions about the nature and meaning of public creative practices in Belarus and the people involved in them. In most general terms, I have addressed these questions during my analysis: *How do Belarusians involved in creative and artistic public events understand these activities? How does this*

involvement relate to different types of Belarusian identities? How do these understandings relate to specific broader social and historical contexts in Belarus?

To address these questions, I involved with the filed as a participant-observer, conducted a series of interviews, and held multiple informal talks with the cultural participants. I also recorded and videotaped the activities under the study and analyzed the discourse found in situated communication. However, more can be done to refine my findings and address the issue in more detail and from a broader perspective.

Thus, one possible avenue for future research is studying other independent and grassroots communities in Belarus to compare the results to see if any of the cultural patterns have been overlooked or not accurately interpreted and described. What is important in this comparison is to go beyond simply artistic, startup, business, and creative communities and also to look at social entrepreneurship and volunteer/philanthropic communities in more detail where the same issues and identities described in this study may be perceived from a slightly different angle and perspective. More specifically, it might be interesting to analyze how the relationships between the "state" and "people," as well as how the role of creativity in everyday practices are described in communication in these communities.

Another possible direction for future study in this area is looking at similar communities in other nearby countries, such as Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia as well as other post-Soviet states. Such analysis would allow comparing the findings and data from other regions that have shared history, but which have developed in their own ways after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It would be interesting and informative to see whether there are any similarities in cultural assumptions and patterns and to what extent

they would be different. This may also allow assembling a collection of cultural discourses about the same phenomena from multiple local cultural perspectives, which may give valuable insights into the idea and essence of public creativity and its relation to innovation and change in various social and cultural contexts.

One more possible direction, as mentioned previously, is to try approaching "state" and official organizations and communities to analyze cultural discourses about public creativity. If turned possible, this may give valuable insights about the phenomena and complement the cultural discourses found at the independent grassroots communities in Belarus.

Another possible avenue for future research is to try quantifying some of the results of this study and applying the concepts about the cultural entities such as "state," "people," "the people who burn," "indifferent people," and other concepts discussed to surveys or other means of gathering quantifiable data. On the one hand, this may be helpful for testing the conceptual framework for describing Belarusian culture and identity presented in Chapter 4 of this study. On the other hand, this may explain some of the important societal trends in more detail and with greater accuracy if applied to the current public opinion polls and other existing instruments for collecting and assessing data about the Belarusian public.

Beyond the communication field, the findings of this study may be used to complement research in the areas of political and electoral studies, public policy, nationalism studies, public opinion studies, and other related disciplines. This would allow adding a deeper cultural perspective and wider explanatory frames to assess social and political processes studied by scholars in these disciplines. I believe that this may

potentially allow in addressing a broader array of topics about Belarus than the prevailing focus on political oppression, media censorship, and the lack of freedom. Thus, using the findings of this study by the scholars of Belarus from other disciplines may broaden the way the country and the region at large are currently perceived and addressed in academic literature worldwide. The same may be true for journalistic accounts and reports, which might benefit from drawing from this study.

Eventually, I hope that this study will benefit the people of Belarus, who may use it to get deeper insights into the everyday practices they are involved in. Many of the issues addressed in this study are taken-for-granted cultural assumptions and evaluations that frequently get unnoticed since they are deeply inscribed into everyday life. Attending to this study may allow some of the Belarusians to critically reflect on themselves and maybe to make some important discoveries about their identities, culture, and everyday life; or to come up with some new ways of being, acting, dwelling, feeling, and relating to each other and the world around.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

This interview guide contains a list of potential topics for discussion with research participants about public creativity in Belarus. Each discussion topic has several probe questions that can be asked if necessary. However, research participants tend to touch upon these questions themselves when they talk about public creativity and their relationship to it.

It is not required to ask all the question probes listed for each topic. The idea of this interview is to let research participants talk and tell their stories about public creativity and their role in it. Each research participant may involve in the discussion of a particular topic and a number of particular topics. It is not required for each research participant to discuss all the topics listed in this guide.

This guide contains the complete list of most of the potential topics that might be relevant for discussion in the Belarusian context, and this means that asking all the questions and covering all the topics on this guide during a single interview is not required. Moreover, covering all the topics will not be possible. For this reason, an interviewer should let the research participant freely talk in deep about those topics related to public creativity, which the research participant feels more comfortable reflecting upon.

The interview should last for approximately 1 hour (+/- 10 minutes). You may start the interview by saying this phrase in your own words:

“I am conducting a study on artistic performances and public communication events in Belarus. The research will help me understand what stands behind the current development of urban culture and public creative performance in Belarus. As a result, the information collected during this study could explain the motive for the creative engagement and meaning of these practices for the contemporary Belarusian society. In addition, this information will show the evolution of the modern Belarusian culture to the international public and may benefit the Belarusian society and Belarusian creative workers.”

After this introduction, give the research participant the Oral Consent Form, let them read through it. Ask whether the participant is willing to continue with the interview. If the participant does not want to continue or wants to stop at any point, you should finish the interview. If the participant is willing to continue, you can start the interview.

Start with showing the research participant two short selected videos related to public creativity in Belarus. I have selected the videos from *Peshehodka (The Pedestrian Zone)* urban festival and *Eshafot (The Gallows)* communication events for this purpose. While the participant is watching videos, you may set-up the video recording equipment to film the interview.

After showing these videos, you may begin the interview by asking a few introductory probes questions. Usually, after a few probe questions, the research participant introduces their own topic for discussion of public creativity, which focuses on one or a few aspects from the list of topics provided in this guide. Let the research participant talk.

If you feel that the research participant switches into discussing something completely irrelevant, you may bring the discussion back by asking one or two probe questions from the list of potential topics on this guide. Do not interrupt the research participant, wait for the natural pause in talk, and then ask a probe question.

A list of potential topics for discussion of public creativity:

Participant's opinion about the events shown on videos:
(ask all the questions in this section)

1. What do you think of this event? Tell me…
2. What do you think is happening here?
3. Can you think of any other examples of events like this? Tell me…

Participation in public creative events:
(If the participant answers 'yes," to question #4, ask all the questions in this section. If the answer is "no," move to the next section)

4. Have you ever been to events like this? Which events…
5. What did you like about these events?
6. What did you like about the venues the events take place at?
7. What didn't you like about these events?
8. What didn't you like about the venues the events take place at?

Participant's role in public creative events:
(You may ask one or more questions in this section depending on the discussion. If the participant has started discussing their own experience with public creativity in more detail, do not interrupt. Wait for a natural pause in the talk)

9. What was your primary role in these events? Why did you go there? (participant, spectator, etc.)
10. How do you feel about the events shown in the video?
11. How do you feel about the other events you participated in? Do they mean anything to you? Why?

Involvement in the creative process:
(Questions 12 and 13 are required)

12. Are you involved in a creative process in any way? (If the informant has mentioned it earlier ask him to tell more about his creative activity)
13. If yes, what is your rationale for being involved in a creative activity?
14. What is your main occupation? (If the main occupation is different from the creative activity, ask why the informant is involved in a creative activity)

Participants of public creative events:
(Make sure to ask questions 15, 16 or 19, and 18, the rest is not mandatory)

15. How do you think, who are all these people who come to the event shown in the video? Why do you think so?
16. Why do you think people come there?
17. Who are all these people who come to the other events you participate in? Why do you think so?
18. Who do you think does not come to the event shown on the video? Why do you think so?
19. Why do you think people do not come there?
20. Who do you think does not come to the other events you participate in? Why do you think so?

The venue for public creative events:
(Ask questions 21 and 22, the rest is not mandatory)

21. How do you think, why does the venue shown on the video exist/operate? What makes it work?
22. Why do you think people come there?
23. Why do you think other venues that you have visited exist/operate? What makes them work?

The popularity of culture and arts in Belarus:
(Ask the questions 24 and 25)

24. How popular do you think are arts and culture in public spaces in Minsk today? In Belarus, in general?
25. Why do you think they are so popular or not popular?

For the topics below, make sure you discuss at least 2-3 topics in detail. If you will be able to discuss more, this is fine. The main point here is to let the research participant talk. It is more likely that the research participant has mentioned a few themes by this point. Use them to prompt the participant to tell more about the themes already mentioned.

At this point, you may also ask your own questions based on the themes mentioned by the participant if you think they are relevant to the topic. The topics below are suggested for discussion but are not required or mandatory.

Organizers of public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

26. Who do you think are the organizes of the event shown on the video? (Is it a private initiative? Is it a government? Anybody else?)
27. Does it matter who organizes these events?
28. Why does it matter or not matter?
29. Who do you think organizes the other events you have participated in? (Is it a private initiative? Is it a government? Anybody else?)
30. Does it matter who organizes these other events you participated in?
31. Why does it matter or not matter?

Public attitude toward public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

32. How do you think others feel about the event shown in the video? Do they like it or not?
33. Why do you think others may like it or not like it?
34. How do you think others feel about the other events you have participated in? (Ask for examples of particular events or use the ones previously mentioned by the informant)
35. Do they like it or not?
36. Why do you think others may like it or not like it? (Ask about particular events previously mentioned in the talk)

Origin and tourism:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

37. Where are you from?
38. How do you think, does this public event shown on video make more people from other countries visit Minsk and Belarus in general?
39. Do you think people from other countries may like this event?
40. Why might they like or not like it?
41. How do you think, do the other public events that you have participated in making more people from other countries visit Minsk and Belarus in general?
42. Do you think people from other countries may like these events? (Ask for specific event examples or use the ones that have already been mentioned in the talk)
43. Why might they like or not like these events?

The language of public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

44. What language is used by the organizers in the event shown on video?
45. Does it matter what language is used by the organizers?
46. Why does it matter or not matter?
47. What language is used by the performers in the event shown on video?
48. Does it matter what language is used by the performers?
49. Why does it or does not matter?
50. What language is used by the visitors in the event shown on video?
51. Does it matter what language is used by visitors?
52. Why does it or does not matter?
53. What language is used by the organizers in the other events that you have participated in?
54. Does it matter what language is used by the organizers?
55. Why does it matter or not matter?
56. What language is used by the performers in the other events that you have participated in?
57. Does it matter what language is used by the performers?
58. Why does it or does not matter?
59. What language is used by the visitors to the other events that you have participated in?
60. Does it matter what language is used by visitors?
61. Why does it or does not matter?

Dress code on public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

62. How do you think the people who visit the event shown on the video are dressed?
63. Why do you think they are dressed this way?
64. How do you think the performers who participate in the video are dressed?
65. Why do you think they dress this way?
66. How do you think the organizers of the event on the video are dressed?
67. Why do you think they are dressed this way?
68. How were the visitors to the other events you visited dressed?
69. Why do you think they are dressed this way?
70. How were the artists/performers of the other events you visited dressed?
71. Why do you think they are dressed this way?
72. How were the organizers of the other events you visited dressed?
73. Why do you think they are dressed this way?

Behavior at the public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

74. How do you think people behave at the event shown in the video?
75. Is it the same as they behave on a regular day?
76. Why do you think they behave the same or not the same?
77. What is the same in their behavior?
78. What is different in their behavior?
79. How did people behave at the other events you participated in?
80. Was it the same as they behave on a regular day?
81. Why do you think they behaved the same or not the same?
82. What was the same in their behavior?
83. What was different in their behavior?

Sponsors and donors of public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

84. Do you know any people or organizations that support/sponsor the event/venue shown on the video?
85. If yes, why do you think they support/sponsor this event?
86. Does it matter who supports/sponsors this event/venue?
87. Why does it matter or not matter?
88. Do you know any people or organizations that support/sponsor the other events/venues that you have participated in?
89. If yes, why do you think they support/sponsor these events?
90. Does it matter who supports/sponsors these events/venues?
91. Why does it matter or not matter?

The proliferation of venues for public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

92. How do you think did the amount of venues where cultural and creative activities are publicly performed has changed in the last 3-4 years?
93. If yes, how do you think it changed?
94. Why do you think it changed this way?
95. Could you name your favorite venues?
96. Why do you like them?

Owners of venues for public creative events:
(Ask if appropriate or if you find the questions in this section useful for the ongoing discussion)

97. Who do you think is in charge of the venue shown on the video?
98. Who do you think is in charge of the venues where the other events that you have visited occur?

Participant's additional ideas
(Ask this question at the end of the interview if relevant)

99. Do you have any additional thoughts or ideas you would like to add to our discussion?

You may finish the interview now. Thank your interlocutor for taking part in this research. Tell the research participant to use the contact information provided on the oral consent form should they have any additional questions or suggestions about the research topic and/or procedures.

Thank you!

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